

THE
IMPERFECTION
OF THE
CREATURE,
AND THE
EXCELLENCY of the DIVINE
COMMANDMENT;

ILLUSTRATED

In Nine SERMONS on Psal. cxix. 96.

By JOHN BARNARD, A. M.

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*This I pray, that your Love may abound yet more and more,
in Knowledge, and in all Judgment, that ye may approve
Things that are excellent ; that ye may be sincere, and
without Offence, 'till the Day of CHRIST. Phil. I. 9, 10.*

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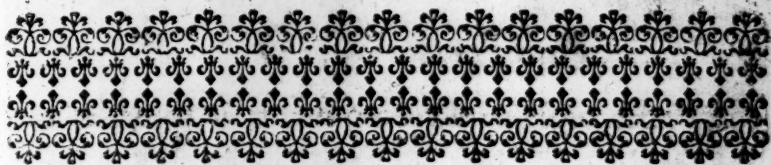
The Author's Absence from the Press has occasioned some Errors which need correcting, as well as some Neglects in pointing which may be born with.

ERRATA.

Page 19. Line 20. for *has*, read *have*. p. 29. l. 30. r. *suit*ed.
 p. 31. l. 21. dele, *Affinity*. p. 35. l. 17. r. *Mannors*. l. 21. after
Variety, add. *and*, p. 45. l. 30. r. *suit*ed. p. 46. l. 29. r. *suit*ed.
 p. 51. l. 19. after *Earth*, add, a Semicolon. p. 67. l. ult. r. *sit*-
teth. p. 82. l. 23. f. *Will*. r. *Wit*. p. 86. l. 22. after *Power*, add
 a Semicolon. p. 87. l. 19. after *of*, add, *the*. p. 105. l. 12, f.
make, r. *made*. p. 116. l. 27. after *Apostles*, add, a Comma. p.
 133. l. 3. f. *these*, r. *the*. p. 136. l. 4. f. *into*, r. *to*. l. 27. r.
*suit*ed. p. 144. l. 25. at the Beginning, add, 2. l. 27. r. *leads*
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diction. p. 175. l. 28. af. *is*. add, *our*. p. 183. l. 11. r. *Rule*
 p. 185. l. 8. f. *false*. r. *safe*. p. 209. l. 20. after *in*, add a
 Comma. p. 210. l. 1. for *and*, r. *to*. p. 220. l. 2. f. *from*, r.
upon. p. 227. l. 24. before *Hence*, add, 7. p. 235. l. 34. f.
what, r. *that*. p. 236. l. 4. f. *may*, r. *must*.

In the Margin.

P. 5. r. *Gen*. i. p. 7. r. 14. p. 13. r. ii. *Tim*. p. 16. r. *Eccl*.
 ii. p. 17. r. *Jam*. ii. p. 37. l. 2, f. 42. r. 46. p. 58. r. *Job*.
 xiv. p. 70. r. *Cor*. vi. p. 100. l. 2. r. 1 *Thef*. iv. p. 112. f. 7.
 r. 8. p. 129. l. 2. r. *Joh*. xvii. p. 142. r. *Gal*. vi. 4. p. 147.
 r. 1. *Joh*. p. 148. l. 1. f. 17. r. 27. p. 157. l. 1. f. 14. r. 24.
 p. 213. r. *Rom*. iii. 20.



THE
Imperfection
OF THE
CREATURE.

SERMON I.

PSALM CXIX. 96.

I have seen an End of all Perfection ; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

THIS *Psalm* gives us a fair, and beautiful, Idea of exalted Piety ; every *Verse* of it breathes the deepest Devotion, and expresses, in bright Characters, the *Psalmist's* high Gust, and Relish for the Divine Law. How deeply is it engraven upon his Heart ? while his continual Meditation upon it is sweet, and his utmost Care is to regulate himself, in his whole Conduct, by it, as the perfect Rule of Life. How does it dwell upon his Tongue ? while he triumphs in
B the

the Praise of it, and recommends it to us, as most worthy of our highest Regards, by the most alluring Arguments, of its own native Excellency, and the blessed Advantages that ever accompany a sincere and hearty Observation of it; and as transcendently illustrious, when compared with the utmost Perfection, and Dignity, the whole Creation can pretend unto.

It is by Way of Comparison, that, in the Words I have read, he raises his own Value, and Esteem of it; and urges it upon us, as challenging our most prevailing Affection, and vigorous Endeavours to conform our selves to the holy Rules of it: *I have seen an End of all Perfection; but Thy Commandment is exceeding broad.* In which Words, there is evidently a Comparison made, between the *Perfection of the Creatures*, or all the Excellency that is to be found upon the Things of this World, and the *Excellency of the Divine Commandment*; and the holy Psalmist, who had a just Acquaintance with all that is excellent in the Creature, as being *King in Jesurun*, and a large Experience of the Sweetness of the Commandment of GOD, as being a Favourite of Heaven, and so a proper Judge in the Case, (besides his being under the Influence of the Divine Spiration) plainly declaring in Favour of the Law of God, and assuring us, that, tho' there is an *End to all the Perfection* that is to be found upon the Creatures, yet the *Commandment of God is exceeding broad*; the Excellency of it far surpasses that of the Creatures, both in Extent, and Duration.

I have seen an End of all Perfection, or I have seen to the End of all the Perfection the whole World can boast of. When I examine the Beauties, and Excellencies, of the Creatures, I need not to travel far, in the Search, before I come to
their

Serm. I. *of the Creature.* 3

their utmost Limits, and see their culminating Point ; they fall within the Compass of my Understanding, and, at most, are to be measured by finite Reason and View. I have seen too, by Experience, that all created Perfection is as finite in its Duration, as limited in its Nature ; and however fair, and promising, it appear'd to me, while at a Distance, yet, when it came within my Reach, and I was ready to flatter my self with a long Series of Happiness in the Enjoyment of it, I was soon convinced of my wild Mistake, for it winged it self away from me. So the greatest Lustre here, not only has its dark Spots, but performs its stated, and short, Revolutions, and then sets in Obscurity. The Glory of this World is transient and fading, and the fairest Lilly will soon wither away. So have I seen an *End of all Perfection* in the Creature ; all the Things of this World, which Men value and esteem at so high a Rate, their Wisdom and Knowledge, their Strength and Fortitude, their Beauty and Gaiety, their Wealth and Furniture, their showy Trapings and Marks of Honour, their Greatness and Magnificence, the Excellency of it all is limited in its Measure, and finite in its Duration.

But, Thy Commandment is exceeding broad. The Excellency, and Perfection, of thy Commandment vastly transcends, both in Measure, and Duration, all that is to be found upon the Creature. This is an unmeasurable Field ; the further I travel in it, the more indeed I see of its large Extent ; but yet, I am never the nearer to the End of it. Here lies the superior Excellency of thy Commandment, that, view it which Way I will, I see it all bright and illustrious, without the least Spot to shade its Glory ; and the more I examine the Beauties of it, the more I behold the Wonders out of thy Law, but
B 2
yet

yet there remains an inscrutable Depth behind, which I am not able to fathom. The higher I climb this steep Ascent, I am the more raised above the loftiest Pinnacle of created Perfection, but the Excellency of thy Commandment maintains a continued Elevation, and is forever above my Reach, and View. So is it, *too broad at Bottom, and at Top too high*, for the utmost Stretch of finite Understanding.

Besides, 'tis forever settled, and made fast in Heaven : that, when the Perfection of the Creature shall fail, and all it's Excellency perish, in the Ruins of Time, the Lustre of thy Law shall forever flourish, nor shall the longest Duration be able to corrode it, or dust it's Glory. Thus *I have seen an End of all Perfection; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.*

Having given this general Discant upon the Words, I am now, more particularly, to discourse on the several Parts of them, under these two Doctrines, which are evidently contained in them : viz.

Doc. I. That the Perfection of the Creature is limited, and finite.

Doc. II. That the Commandment of God is exceeding broad.

I shall begin with the first of these Doctrines.

Doc. I. That the Perfection of the Creature is limited, and finite ; limited in it's Measure, and finite in it's Duration.

In discoursing on this Head, I shall endeavour to evidence these two Things.

I. That the Perfection of the Creature is limited in it's Nature and Measure.

II. That the Perfection of the Creature is finite in it's Duration.

I. The

Serm. I. *of the Creature.* 5

I. The first Thing I have to do is, to shew, that the Perfection of the Creature is limited in it's Nature and Measure. And this will sufficiently appear, if we take a View of the Creature abstractedly, and by it's self, or in it's Relation.

1. Let us take a View of the Creatures, abstractedly, and by themselves, and we shall plainly see an End of all Perfection. For there is nothing, within the Compass of created Nature, so exalted in its Form, and Endowments, as to lay Claim unto the high and honourable Title of Perfection. There is, indeed, a Sort of Perfection belonging unto all the Creatures, namely, a *Perfection of Being* ; that is, that they are Creatures of that Rank, and Order, which the great and wise Creator designed them for ; so they are perfect in their Kind, and want nothing to render them as compleat, in their Natures, as they were originally intended to be. And therefore when the Infinite Mind surveyed the Works of His Hand, after He had finished the Six Days Creation, He said of them all, (*a.*) *they are very good* : that is, perfect in their Kind ; and as they all were made what they were intended for ; so they shall all answer the several wise Ends for which they were created, and all conspire to this ultimate End of their Being, the shewing forth of their Maker's Praise. But though the Creatures can boast of this Perfection of Being, or Kind, which agrees to the meanest Insect ; as well as to the highest Angel, yet this hinders not, but that we may see to the End of all Perfection upon the Creatures, as to the real Nature, Measure, and Degree thereof. For this Perfection of Being is but improperly called Perfection. Perfection, properly speaking, comprehends in it all possible Excellencies,

(*a.*) Gen. 3. 31.

and in the utmost possible Degree of these Excellencies. And there is no Man can imagine, but that the great Creator could, if He had pleased, have furnished any of His Creatures with some Excellencies which they are now destitute of, or have endowed them, with those Excellencies they are possessed of in a higher Degree ; though yet it is no Argument that they are not perfect in their Kind, that more, and greater, Excellencies are not conferred upon them, than their Nature required ; and to find Fault that the Creatures have not that Perfection which any of them might have had, is to complain of the Creator for His making such a Variety of Creatures, or, indeed, for His making any Creature at all, for the very best does and cannot but fall short of Perfection, because it is a Creature. So that we may plainly see an End of all Perfection in the Creatures, in that,

1. There are none of the Creatures that can pretend to be possessed of all possible Excellencies. God has furnished His several Creatures with a very great Variety of Excellencies suited to their particular Natures, to some more, and some less, but there is none of them all can boast, I have all, and can have no more added to me : But, to allude to the *Apostle's* Expression, (b) *There are celestial Bodies, and Bodies terrestrial ; but the Glory of the celestial is one, and the Glory of the terrestrial is another : There is one Glory of the Sun, and another Glory of the Moon, and another Glory of the Stars ; yea, and one Star differeth from another Star in Glory.* So the alwise Creator hath distributed to the several Creatures their various, and particular, Excellencies ; and while one prides himself in his Beauty, another triumphs in his Strength, and a third glorieth in his Wisdom and

(b) 1 Cor. xv. 40, 41.

Understanding ;

Serm. I. *of the Creature.*

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Understanding ; but none of them can say, I am possessed of all Excellencies, and need no more to attain unto compleat Perfection. The most penetrating Eye cannot say to the active Hand, I have no Need of thee ; nor the exalted Head to the depressed Feet, I have no Need of you. There may be some Excellencies, in the lower Order of Beings, which, perhaps, the higher are without ; and there are other Excellencies which are altogether incompatible unto any mere Creature, even the highest ; such are the incommunicable Perfections of the supream Deity, whose Prerogative alone it is, to say, *I am that I am.* (c) Besides,

2. There is no Excellency possess'd by any of the Creatures in the utmost possible Degree of that Excellency. There are not only several Excellencies, which are peculiar to this or that Creature, which others are destitute of, but even those, among the Creatures, which have the largest Share in the Divine Bounty, yet are not Owners of any one Excellency, no not that which they most glory in, in its proper Perfection. For where there is proper Perfection, there is an Infinity of that Excellency, and there cannot be any possible higher Degrees of it. But if the particular Excellency, any Creature is possessed of, will admit any further, or higher, Degrees of the same to be yet added to it, 'tis then very evident, that that Excellency is not possessed in its utmost Fullness, and that therefore it wants of proper Perfection : And to suppose, that any one Creature, even the brightest among all the Sons of the Morning, should be Owner of any one Excellency, in the utmost possible Degree thereof, is to suppose that Creature to be equal with GOD ; than

(c) *Exod. iii. 24.*

B 4

which

8 *The Imperfection* Sermon. I.

which what can imply a greater Contradiction ? The Distance between Finite, and Infinite, is too great to admit of any Gradation, so that there is no passing from the one to the other : 'Tis utterly impossible, that a Creature, which is, by the Law of his make, of the lower Order of Being, should ever rise to the highest, as he must do to be invested with any one Excellency in a proper Infinitude ; because it can never cease to be a Creature ; as it necessarily must do to be Infinite. Where there is true Perfection, there is all ; all in Kind, and all in Degree, and This is no where to be found but in the great Creator, who is *all Perfect*, to whom nothing can be added, nor from whom any Thing subtracted, in whom is every real Excellency, and in the most transcendent Measure, and Degree, beyond all that we can speak, or think of. All the Excellencies of the Creatures are derived from GOD, the immense Fountain of Perfection, the *Father of Lights from whom comes every good and perfect Gift* ; and the Streams, which any of the Creatures partake of, necessarily fall short of, and are, in Degree, below, that Fullness which is in the Fountain, that constantly supplies them, where all Excellencies centre, and are in their highest Exaltation. Therefore GOD justly challenges His People, in that Strain, of the Prophet *Isaiab*, (d) *To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal ; and compare me, that we may be like ?* To which I might add,

3. That the highest Degree of Perfection in the Creature may be scanned, examined, and compassed, by an intelligent finite Mind. Though we may not be able to understand all the Excellencies that are in some of the Creatures, yet this

(d) *Isa. xvi. 5.*

may be, not the Want of Capacity in us to comprehend them, but, the Want of their lying open to our Search and Enquiry. There are Intelligences, of a higher Order than our selves, that excel in Wisdom and Knowledge, who may have a just Understanding of their own Excellencies, and of the Creatures below them. Yea, we our selves are able to conceive of much greater Excellencies, greater Degrees of Perfection, than are to be found upon any of the Creatures ; as the infinite Perfections of GOD. So that a finite and bounded Capacity may reach to the utmost Extent of created Excellency ; which shews that the Perfection of the Creature is limited as to its Nature, Measure, and Degree, if we consider it abstractedly, and by it self. And now,

2. Let us take a View of the Creature in its Relation, and we shall plainly see an End of all Perfection. The Excellencies of the Creatures will shine in their greatest Lustre, if we consider them, in their Relation to one another ; because there is an exact Symmetry, and Proportion, in the several Parts of the Creation, and the Excellency, each Part is endowed with, exactly corresponds to that Symmetry, and is wonderfully adapted to secure the Order, and promote the common Good, of the whole by a relative Serviceableness of one Thing unto another. So that we might well cry out, with the Psalmist, † *O Lord, how manifold are thy Works ; in Wisdom hast thou made them all !* My Business here is not to Philosophise, and therefore I shall forbear such a Discourse upon the Relation, Dependence, and Usefulness, of the several Parts of the Creation, to one another, as my Subject would naturally enough lead me to, and confine my Thoughts to the Aspect which the

† *Psalm civ. 24.*

Creature has, in its Relation to Man, the most noble of the visible Creation ; and consequently, in its Relation to whom, its Excellencies will shine with the brightest Rays.

Now, There are two Rules by which we may examine the Perfection of the Creature, in its Relation to us, which seem to me to be determinative in the Case, viz. as it is perfective of our Nature, or compleative of our Happiness : And if, upon Examination, we find the Nature, Measure, and Degree of Excellency in the Creature, fall short of coming up to these Rules, it will be a plain Conviction to us, that *there is an End of all Perfection.*

I. First then ; Let us examine whether the Creature is perfective of our Nature. And in Order to pass a true Judgment, it will be necessary, first, to say wherein the Perfection of our Nature lies ; for if we are not determined in this, we shall in vain enquire, how far the Creature is able to answer this End.

Now I take it that the Perfection of our Nature consists in its moral Rectitude, or the Harmony of the Soul, in the Actings of all its Powers, in Subordination to right Reason, and pure and undefiled Religion : Because then only do we act like our selves, and preserve the Dignity, and End, of our Make, when right Reason presides, and has the full Government of us, in all the inward Operations of the Mind, as well as the outward Actions of the Body, so as to preserve us from the Tumult of the Passions, and Usurpation of the Senses, and to direct all that we do to the ultimate End of serving and glorifying our Maker, and supream Lord. And however any, sunk under the Power of a depraved Mind, and the Government of their Senses, may be ready to imagine, that

that the Perfection of their Nature consisteth in the Health, and Strength, of their Bodies, and the full Enjoyment of their sensual Gratifications, yet a little Observation will convince them, that there may be all of this, while they enjoy only the Perfection of the Brute, and not of the Man. For certainly, the Perfection of the humane Nature must lie, in its Likeness unto GOD, who is all perfect. The moral Perfections of the Deity are the truest Glory of the divine Nature. *GOD is glorious in Holiness. (e)* The nearer we resemble GOD herein, the nearer we arrive unto true Perfection, being *perfect as our Father, which is in Heaven, is perfect. (f)*

Now we find, to our Sorrow, if we take a serious View of ourselves, that, as we come into this World, and walk according to the Course of it, there is a perpetual Jarr and Discord in our Souls, the Actings of our Understanding, and Will, often interfere, and our Passions clash among themselves, and the Senses ride in State, so that there is nothing but Irregularity and Disorder in us ; and as the Heighth of this Mischief upon us, to *do Good we have no Knowledge, while to do Evil is present with us : (g)* So true is what the inspired Prophet tells us, *(h) The whole Head is sick, and the whole Heart is faint ; from the Sole of the Foot, even unto the Head, there is no Soundness, but Wounds, and Bruises, and putrifying Sores.* That is, the humane Nature is vitiated by Sin, so that *there is not a just Man upon Earth that doth Good and sinneth not ;* and if we say we have no Sin, we *deceive our selves, and the Truth is not in us ;* as the sacred Oracles teach us. Doubtless, this is the Weakness, and Imperfection of our Nature ; not

(e) *Exod. xv. 11.* (f) *Matth. v. 48.* (g) *Jer. iv. 22. Rom. vii. 21.* (h) *Isa. i. 5, 6.*

what we received from our Maker, but what we have contracted to our selves, by our Apostacy from Him ; and therefore the Perfection of our Nature consisteth, in having all these Maladies cured, these Wounds healed, these Disorders rectified, and in having the Soul brought into such a Constitution, and Temper, as to be able to act by the Rules of right Reason, and live up to the Height of its noble Endowments, in a religious glorifying of its Maker, and serving its Fellow-Creatures : That is to say, in being *renewed in the Spirit of our Mind, and having on the new Man, which, after GOD, is created in Righteousness, and true Holiness.* (i)

Now, if we consult the whole Circle of created Beings, and examine the highest Advantages they are capable, of themselves, of affording us, upon this Account, in their nearest Relation to us, we shall find, that they are not, nor can they be, thus perfective of our Nature. If it were in their Power to answer this great and noble End, it would be either in the Knowledge of them, or the Enjoyment of them, or the Improvement of them ; but in all of these they are greatly defective, and leave us as they find us. Let us view over these Particulars.

1. The Creatures are not perfective of our Nature in the Knowledge of them. It is true, when we consider Man only as rational, or capable of understanding, the more advanced any are in Knowledge, the truer Insight they may have into the Nature of Things, the better Acquaintance they gain with the Reason of the Connexion, Dependence, and Operation, of Causes, and Effects, and the further Discoveries they make into the *Arcana* of Nature, they are so much the more

(i) *Eph.* iv. 23, 24.

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raised above the Level of those meaner Souls, who know, scarce, nothing, but that they are. This enlarged Knowledge may brighten a Man, enoble his Mind, and set him above his Neighbours, as being furnished with what is really a very great Excellency, too high for them to attain unto; but yet all the Knowledge, in Nature, any Man can attain unto, will leave him at as great a Distance from moral Rectitude, as the Devils themselves are.

The brightest Character of our perfected Nature is Religion; and the Knowledge which is serviceable to that End is, the *Knowledge of the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST, whom He hath sent* (k); that is a spiritual Wisdom, and Understanding, in the Mysteries of GOD, and our holy Religion, which is ever productive of a renewed Mind, and a vertuous and religious Conversation, and is therefore called a being *wise unto Salvation*. (l) Now if the bare Knowledge of the Creatures had this good Effect upon the Minds of Men, we might rationally expect to find, that those who are of the acuteſt Judgment, the cleareſt Reasoning, the politeſt Learning, and have the greateſt Acquaintance with the Myſteries of Nature, and Art, ſhould always be Men of the greateſt Religion, the deepeſt Devotion, and the pureſt Morals. Theſe certainly, if any, ſhould be the Men, who are the moſt God-like in their Temper, and Behaviour, who have the Divine Image ſtamped upon them, in whom old Things are done away, and all Things are become new: Theſe, of all Mankind, ſhould be the Men of the greateſt Vertue, and Probity; who have the beſt Government of their Appetites and Paſſions, and moſt ſteadily preſerve a Decorum in all their Actions;

(k) *John* xvii. 3. (l) *1 Tim.* iii. 15.

who are least offensive to their Maker, and injurious to their Neighbours ; who are most constant, and regular, in their Acknowledgments to the supream Being, and their Beneficence to Man. But, alas ! we often see the very Reverse of all this ! Daily Experience convinces us, that the most advanced Knowledge in the hidden Things of Nature, and of Art, does not correct the Excesses, and inordinate Appetites, of a depraved Mind ; but the wisest of Men, for worldly Wisdom, are often the greatest Fools, with Respect to that Wisdom that is from above, and are utter Strangers to a Life of true Religion. Thus the *Apostle* minds us, (*m*) that *not many wise Men, after the Flesh, are called.*

There have, indeed, through the sovereign Grace of GOD, been some of the great, and wise, and learned, Men, of the World, effectually called off from their Subjection, and Slavery, to vile Lusts, as well as from heathenish Idolatry, to the Knowledge, Love, and Service of the only true GOD, and His Son JESUS CHRIST ; but there have not been many such. The Men of the greatest Knowledge, and Learning, have generally been too haughty, and opinionated of themselves, and fond of their own Parts, to submit their Understandings to the Government of Divine Revelation, and credit those Doctrines which they looked upon as no better than Foolishness, because they could not understand the Mysteries contained in them ; and too stubborn to comply with those holy Rules which interfered with their gratifying their carnal Appetites, and pursuing their secular Interests. More generally, they have been Men of lower Parts, and Attainments, who have applied themselves less to Speculations, and more to Practice,

(*m*) 1 Cor. i. 26.

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15

that have received the Dictates of Divine Wisdom, and corrected the Disorders of their Nature, by a conscientious Regard to the holy Rules of the Gospel. Our blessed Saviour therefore said, (n) *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven, and Earth, because thou hast hid these Things from the wise, and prudent, and hast revealed them unto Babes.* The greatest Masters of Reason, in our Saviour's, and the Apostle's Days, as the Scribes, and Pharisees, among the *Jews*, and the learned Philosophers, among the *Gentiles*, were the greatest Enemies to this Perfection of our Nature, and the most violent Opposers of that Divine Philosophy, those heavenly Doctrines, which the Son of GOD came to instruct the World in : And it were well if there were not too many such in our Days also.

This is the Argument the royal Preacher pursues. He lays this down as the Sum of the Matter, (o) *Fear GOD, and keep His Commandments, for this is the whole of Man :* And having examined how far Wisdom, and Knowledge, that which is natural and humane, would conduce to this high and noble End, he found, upon Trial, that it all fell vastly short, and therefore inscribes Vanity upon it. *I gave my self, says he, (p) to seek, and to search out, by Wisdom, concerning all Things that are done under Heaven ;—I have seen all the Works that are done under the Sun, and behold all is Vanity.* So again, (q) *I applied mine Heart to know and search, and to seek out, Wisdom, and the Reason of Things ;—and lo, this only have I found, that GOD made Man upright, but they have sought out many Inventions.* This Knowledge, and Wisdom, has been abused by them, and instead of purifying their Hearts, and rectifying their Lives, and per-

(n) *Matth. xi. 25.* (o) *Eccl. xii. 13.* (p) *Eccl. i. 13, 14.*

(q) *Ch. vii. 25, 29.*

fecting

fecting their Natures, it has been misimproved, by them, to the nourishing of their Lusts, to Profaneness, and Contempt of GOD, and Religion, to insult, and oppress their Fellow Creature ; and thus GOD has been the more dishonoured, and humane Society the greater Sufferers, by them. So that the Knowledge of the Creature is not perfective of our Nature :

2. Nor are the Creatures perfective of our Nature in the Enjoyment of them. This also Solomon, (than whom no Man had greater Opportunities to know,) assures us, from his own Experience, *(r) I gathered me, says he, Silver and Gold, and the peculiar Treasure of Kings, and of the Provinces ; I gat me Men Singers, and Women Singers, and the Delights of the Sons of Men, as musical Instruments, and that of all Sorts ; so I was great, and increased more than all that were before me, in Jerusalem ;—and whatsoever mine Eyes desired, I kept not back from them ; I withheld not my Heart from any Joy : for my Heart rejoiced in all my Labour ;—then I looked on all the Works that my Hands had wrought, and on the Labour that I had laboured, [that is, to see what was the Produce of it all, what Influence it had upon my fearing GOD, and keeping of His Commandments,] and behold all was Vanity, and Vexation of Spirit, and there was no Profit under the Sun.* That is, I plainly saw, it had no Tendency to rectify the Vitiosity of my depraved Nature.

And, accordingly, we see, that Men of the greatest worldly Possessions, surrounded with the Affluence of earthly good Things, who have more than Heart could wish for, are not, ordinarily, the meek, and humble, the temperate,

(r) Eccl. xi. 8, 11.

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and sober, the truly vertuous and religious Persons. Did the Enjoyment of the Creature perfect our Nature, then the more a Man possessed, the more regular would he be, in the Actings of his Mind, and in his outward Behaviour; and none but the worldly Poor would be the Servants of Lust and Passions. Were Men to excell in Vertue, and Holiness, proportionable to the Difference of their Temporal Accomodations, what mighty Heroes should we see? what angelic Creatures should we converse with? Whereas, though the wealthy and great may affect, what is called a more genteel, and polite Carriage, and, in their general Conduct, be less rough, and boisterous, yet we may easily observe, that they are, many of them, never the less under the Dominion of various Lusts, and Passions, and ordinarily give a greater Scope to them, though with more of Caution, than other mean Men. Hence the Apostle *James* says, (s) *Do not rich Men oppress you, and draw you before the Judgment Seat? Do not they blaspheme that worthy Name, by the which ye are called?* What is there more common, than to see those that are increased in Goods, living in Contempt, and Defiance, of that GOD who bestoweth all upon them; and grievously oppressing their poor Neighbour, with burdensome, needless, and often unjust Law Suits; by hard Usage, and cruel Gripings, in their Dealings with him; by Delays of Payment, when they have it by them, and making him to dance Attendance as much almost as his Debt is worth, and at last putting him off with near a Third less than his Dues, by an exorbitant Demand upon their Goods beyond what they could have been purchased with

(s) *James* xi. 6, 7.

his Money ; and all this while the rich Man wipes his Mouth, and cries I am Innocent, and do no Harm, I must live by my Business, and make the best of my Wares : thus his Abundance but encreases his Thirst, blinds his Eyes, and deludes his Judgment, and leads him into some of the most enormous Crimes. *Yea, I saw under the Sun, the Place of Judgment, that Wickedness was there ; and the Place of Righteousness, that Iniquity was there, said the Preacher **. Thus their worldly Enjoyments do but make many to become devouring Wolves to their more innocent Neighbours, instead of subduing their various Lusts and Passions : the Multiplicity of their Possessions increases their Appetites, and, when these are uppermost, no Wonder Reason and Religion, are trampled on.

Worldly Possessions have no Tendency to make a Man truly vertuous, and give him the Mastery over himself : and, indeed, how should they ? When the Enjoyments of this World are so peculiarly adapted to the carnal and sensual Part of the Man, and have no Affinity with a spiritual and immortal Soul, and so can have no natural Influence to bring that unto Perfection, by rectifying it's Disorders, and pruding in it the highest Acts of Reason, and Religion ; but rather the directly contrary Tendency, to keep the Soul in it's imperfect State, and under the Power of it's natural Depravity, by blinding the Eyes, biasing the Will, and pre-engaging of the Affections, with the Glitter of Riches, and Honour, Grandeur, and Magnificence, and the like.

For, besides the present Union of the Soul to the Body, and consequently the Communication from the Senses to the intellectual Powers, by which Means the Soul becomes affected with what

* *Ecc. iii. 16.*

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affects the Body, that is to say, is pleased, or pained, as Things are agreeable, or disagreeable, unto the Body, and so is inclined to will, and embrace, what is pleasurable, and reject, and fly from, what is painful to the Senses ; I say, besides this, the natural Depravity which the Soul labours under, has sunk it so much below its original Dignity, that instead of its being the Guide and Director of our Senses, and wise Governor of our Appetites, it is fallen under the Power and Dominion of them, and its Volition and Choice is now governed, by the greedy Desires of Sense, and her mean and low Joys arises only from sensual Gratifications : Thus the Mind is become *carnal, fleshly*, subject to *fleshly Lusts*, and *minding the Things of the Flesh*. And hence the Enjoyment of the Creature, which so exactly corresponds with our vitiated Appetites, instead of exalting the Soul, by freeing it from the superior Influence the Senses has over it, and restoring it to its primitive Rectitude, and Dominion, does but so much the more debase it, and enslave it to the Delights of the animal Life : For these Enjoyments, affording such Delight and Pleasure to the animal Spirits, please the vitiated Soul also, and hence urges her upon breaking through all the Boundaries of Reason, and Religion, rather than go without them.

A Sense of this made *Agur* put up that Petition, (t) *Give me neither Poverty, nor Riches, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the LORD ? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the Name of my GOD in vain.* And hence 'tis, that the Apostle says, (u) *They that will be rich, fall into Temptation, and a Snare, and many foolish and hurtful Lusts, which drown Men in Destruction and Perdition.* Thus much also our blessed Saviour hath taught

(t) *Prov. xxx. 8, 9.* (u) *1 Tim. vi. 9.*

us, when He said, (*w*) *Verily, a rich Man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* Which, at least, supposes thus much, that their Riches, and Abundance, is so far from promoting their real Vertue, that they rather tend greatly to hinder it; and so render it the more difficult, for those that enjoy them, to withstand their Temptations, and get safe to Heaven at last.

So that we see, that neither the Knowledge, nor the Enjoyment of the Creature, is, of its self, perfective of our Nature.

3. Nor will the highest Improvement, we can, of our selves, make of the Creature, have this blessed Effect upon us, the Perfection of our Nature. This is the last Result, and here we may see the utmost Advantage the Creatures can be unto us, in the Improvement which may be made of them.

And now, if upon Examination, the Creatures are not found to be perfective of our Nature, by the highest Improvement we can make of them, we may then justly write upon them all, *I have seen an End of all Perfection*; and yet, alas, here they all fail us!

For, suppose a Man to make the greatest Advantage of the Creatures, that he possibly can; 'tis evident, that his Eating, and Drinking, of the most delicious, and in the greatest Abundance, his most gorgeous Apparel, and sumptuous Buildings, and the most eager Pursuit of his Sports, and Pastimes, and the utmost Indulgence of the Pleasures of Sense, have not the least Look towards the refining, and perfecting of his Nature. Suppose him then, to think soberly, and make Use of the Creatures as Topicks, and Heads of Argument, for the Confirmation of the Truth of

(*w*) *Matth. xix. 23.*

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our holy Religion, which I think is the highest Improvement the Man, in the Exercise of his Reason only, can make of them ; yet, will this change his Heart ? Will this bring him to a proper religious Acknowledgment of GOD ? or stamp the Divine Image upon him ? Certainly, it will not. Even this noble Advantage the Creatures are improvable unto, has nothing of a truly religious Aspect, in the natural Man, but only tends to the Advancement of his speculative Knowledge ; and 'tis much, if, at the same Time, it does not the more nourish his Pride and Haughtiness, which will but throw him at a greater Distance from GOD, and Goodness.

For, what Improvement can unsanctified Nature make of any Thing, but what is agreeable unto its self, and serves to promote its sensual Gratifications ? And this is so far from curing the Irregularities of the lapsed Soul, that, as I have already shewed, it does but so much the more debase, and pollute it. It will be but a *Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof.* Hence the Apostle gives this as a Reason, why carnal Minds receive not the Things they pray for, (*x*) *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your Lusts.* The feeding, and nourishing of his Lusts, are the great Ends, the carnal Man, who walks after the Flesh, aims at, in all that he does ; and therefore the promoting of these Ends is the utmost Advantage he can improve any Thing for.

Though a sanctify'd Heart receives his Enjoyments, as the Bounty of his heavenly Father unto him, is thankful for them, and endeavours to improve them to the Honour of his gracious Benefactor ; yet, one under the Power of his original

(*x*) *Jam. iv. 3.*

Apostacy has no such vertuous, and holy Principles in him, no such high and noble Ends to aim at ; and therefore, instead of sacrificing to the living JEHOVAH, we can expect no other from him, than that he should take *his Corn, and Wine, and Oil, and Silver, and Gold, and burn Incense unto Baal* therewith, as GOD complains His People of old did. (y) And the more his Enjoyments are, we may reasonably fear a more exalted Degree of Wickedness, unless the common restraining Grace of GOD prevent it ; because he will now have the fairer Opportunity in his Hands, and the stronger Enticements, to comply with his carnal Desires, and follow after his Lusts with Greediness.

There is nothing in the Creature that has any natural Tendency to recover us from our lapsed Condition, and therefore it is not improvable by us, from any Vertue in it self, or any Power in us, to this glorious End. And though GOD, by His Almighty Power, and the Operation of His Divine Spirit, may make Use of any Creature, as Means, to recover us to a holy and religious Conversation, and improve His Embassadors, as Instruments, in the converting of a Sinner from the Error of his Ways, and award unto them a proportionable Crown of Glory for their Serviceableness therein, yet the unconverted Soul has no Power and Ability, of himself, to make this good Improvement even of them.

In short ; it is a supernatural Work of Grace, wrought in the Soul, by the Almighty Power of GOD Himself, that alone is sufficient to *quicken us, who by Nature are dead in Trespasses and Sins*, to recover the Soul from the Confusions our Apostacy has brought upon it, and restore our vitiated Minds to

(y) *Hof. ii. 8.*

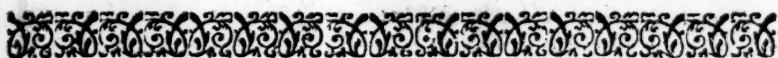
their

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their original Perfection ; and it is not in the Power of all created Nature, improved by finite Skill, and Strength, to the utmost Advantage, to accomplish this glorious Work, because it is supernatural. Nay, if we could converse with Angels, and had the same Opportunity of making Advantages from them, that we have of good and holy Men, among whom we dwell, we should find that, though they have Vertue enough for themselves, yet they have none to spare to us, and therefore, in vain should we expect any from them, nor could they be so much as instrumental to work this Change in us, without the Co-operation of GOD, *whose Workmanship we are, created, in CHRIST JESUS, unto good Works.* (2) And if our best Improvement of the pure and holy Spirits, would not perfect our Nature, much less, I am sure, would any Thing in the visible Creation, be able to restore us to a Participation of the Divine Nature, and bring us to live the Divine Life, in our Conformity to the Holiness and Purity, the Righteousness, Mercy, and Truth of GOD ; because this beautiful and glorious Image, is not any Ways inherent in, or necessarily connected to, any of them, as an essential Property of their Nature, nor indeed is any Ways applicable to the most of them ; and they cannot be supposed to produce an Effect, so infinitely more noble and glorious, than any Thing they have in themselves.

Thus we see an *End of all Perfection*, in the Creatures, in that they are not, nor can they be, of themselves, perfective of our Nature, neither in the Knowledge, the Enjoyment, nor the Improvement of them.

(2) *Eph. ii. 10.*



S E R M O N II.

P S A L M CXIX. 96.

I have seen an End of all Perfection ; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

I Have observed these two doctrinal Truths, as plainly contained in those Words of the royal Psalmist which I have read ; viz.

Doc. I. The Perfection of the Creature is limited and finite.

Doc. II. The Commandment of GOD is exceeding broad.

I entered upon the Consideration of the first of these the last Opportunity, namely,

Doc. I. The Perfection of the Creature is limited and finite.

In discoursing upon this Subject, I proposed to evidence these two Things :

I. The Perfection of the Creature is limited in its Nature, and Measure. And

II. The Perfection of the Creature is finite in its Duration. I have already offered something to the first of these Heads, and shewed you, that

I. Upon

Serm. II. *of the Creature.* 25

1. Upon a more abstracted View of the Creature, we shall evidently see its Perfection limited; forasmuch as there are none of the Creatures that can pretend to the Possession of all possible Excellencies, nor of any one Excellency in the utmost possible Degree thereof, but the highest Degree of their Perfection falls within the Compass of a finite Mind. I have also entred upon the Consideration of the Creature,

2. In its Relation, more especially to Man: and to evidence the Imperfection of it, I proposed these two Arguments, as clear Proofs of it, *viz.* That it cannot be perfective of our Nature; neither is it compleative of our Happiness. I have shewed,

I. The Creature is not perfective of our Nature: And that neither in the Knowledge of it, the Enjoyment of it, nor in the best Improvement we can make of it. I now proceed to consider the Force of the second Argument, *viz.*

II. The Creature cannot be compleative of our Happiness. These are the two Rules, by which, I said, we are to examine and try the Perfection of the Creature, in its Relation to us, *viz.* As it is perfective of our Nature, and compleative of our Happiness; for nothing can be truly and fully perfect, respecting us, but what is able to answer both these great Ends. I have examined the Excellency of the Creature, by the first of these Rules, and it is found wanting; we plainly see that it is too mean, and low, to restore us to our primitive Integrity, Uprightness, and Perfection; and this affords us full Conviction, that, so far, the Perfection of the Creature is limited in its Nature and Measure.

I am now to examine the Excellencies of the Creature, by the second Rule, and see whether it will

26 *The Imperfection* Serm. II.

will compleat our Happiness ; and if it fail in this also, we may be sure that *there is an End of all Perfection.*

Now, besides the Consideration that our Happiness cannot be compleat, while as yet our Nature is not perfected ; because there will be something, wanting, in our very Temper, and Disposition, to give us the true Gust, and Relish, of Happiness ; and something, inwrought into our Temper, that would render us unhappy ; I say, besides this, it must be remembred, that our Happiness lieth, in the true, and full Enjoyment of a Good, foreign to us, that is every Way exactly proportionable to us.

For the very Make, and State, of the humane Nature necessitates it, that a Man look around him for some foreign Aid, in the Enjoyment whereof he may be happy. If we examine the Make and Constitution of the humane Nature, we shall plainly see, that, with Respect to both its constituent Parts, Soul, and Body, Man is a dependant Creature, which derived his Being from another, and is beholden to something out of himself for his Powers, and Capacities, his Support, and Comfort ; and his Happiness can no more arise from himself than his Being could : So that, seeing he is not self-sufficient, let his Felicity consist in what it will, it must necessarily originate from some other Cause than himself. This was the Case even of innocent Man, in Paradise, who, though his Powers were much more bright and healthy, than any of his natural Descendents, yet, was a Creature that derived his Being from another, and was subordinate to, and wholly dependent upon, that Cause from whence he received his Being ; and consequently all the true Happiness he could expect, or grasp, must be derivative. But if we take a View of Man's
present

present State, since the Fall, it will appear, in the clearest Light, that we are insufficient for our own Happiness, and are beholden to another for it, if ever we attain thereto ; because our present State is evidently a State of very great Weaknesses, and Deficiencies, and that both of Body, and Mind. So that nothing can be more evident, than, that a Man must seek abroad, and look around him, for some Object, in the Possession whereof, to delight himself, and be truly happy. It is the Privilege of GOD alone to be self-sufficient ; and 'till any Man can boast of equal essential Excellencies, Perfections, and Glories, with those of the self-existent, independent Deity, he will remain in a State of Dependence, Craving, and Want, and need something, out of himself, and foreign to him, to complete his real Happiness.

Now, this foreign Good, which is sufficient to render a rational, and immortal Creature happy, must necessarily be, every Way, proportioned to us ; because no Object can have any, the least, Tendency to advance our Happiness, any farther than as it is agreeable to us, in one Respect, or other ; and that which pretends to render us completely happy, must be every Way exactly agreeable, without the least Deficiency in its Correspondency to us ; otherwise the Disagreement between Us, and That, will everlastingly cramp all the Happiness which else might arise therefrom, and give us a painful Uneasiness. For what is Misery ? but something or other disagreeable to us ; and the Degrees of Misery, are more, or less, proportionable to the Disagreement of the Object to us. But then, upon Supposition of a Good proportionable to us, it must be truly, and fully enjoyed by us, or there cannot possibly be any Happiness derived from it, to us. For if the greatest
Good

Good is not applied to us, how can we receive any Benefit from it? The most Miserable may know that there is such a Thing as compleat Happiness, and in what it consisteth, and yet, without a futable Application of it unto themselves, that is, without their Enjoyment of it, be nevertheless miserable; yea, their Knowledge of it will be so far from abating their Misery, as that it will but so much the more encrease it upon them. Our blessed Saviour therefore acquaints us, that it will be a very great Addition to the Misery of the Wicked, that they shall be able to discern something of the Happiness of the Righteous, which they themselves shall have no Part and Share in; saying, (in *Luke's Gospel*,) *There shall be weeping, and gnashing of Teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the Prophets, in the Kingdom of GOD, and you yourselves thrust out.*† If therefore the Creature fail in both, or either, of these Respects, it can never compleat our Happiness. This then is what I have to do, to shew, that the Creature is neither a proportionable Good, nor truly enjoyed by us, and therefore cannot compleat our Happiness.

1. The Creature is not a proportionable Good, and therefore cannot compleat our Happiness. In order to a Good's being proportionable to us, it must exactly correspond with our Nature, be suited to our various Wants, and Desires, and be durable, or continue as long as we shall have any Being, or Occasion for it; for if it fail in any of these Regards, if it should be jarring with our Nature, or unable to satisfy us, or to continue with us, it is very certain, that then it holds no Proportion with us, and therefore can be no sure Foundation for our Happiness; and yet in all these Regards

† *Luke* xiii. 28.

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the Creature is disproportionable to us. As, briefly to hint,

1. The Creature is not proportionable to our Nature. For the humane Nature is not entirely made up of Flesh and Sense, but has a spiritual and immortal Part essentially belonging to it, which is more excellent than our Bodies, and greatly to be preferred before them. Our Thinking, our Reasoning, and our Reflection, besides our Capacity for compleat Happiness, and our Desires after it, are evident Proofs, that our Nature consists of, what we call Spirit, as well as Body. For mere Matter, according to all its known Properties, and the Laws of Motion, will never be able to produce one Thought, so that That Part of us, which thinketh, is very different from our Bodies, having none of the same Properties belonging to it, and therefore is Immaterial, or Spirit. And accordingly we find the Apostle *Paul* distributes the Nature of Man into *Spirit, Soul, and Body.* (a) The *Body* is the gross Substance, made up of Flesh, and Blood, and Bones, and is the Object of Sense; the *Soul*, I take it, means the animal Life, with its vegetative, nutritive, and procreative Powers; and by the *Spirit* is intended the proper immaterial Substance, the intellectual Mind, that spiritual and immortal Part, which we generally call the Soul.

Now, though the Creature may be, in a very great Measure, suted unto the Body, and to the Support, and Comfort, of the animal Life, yet, 'till the true intellectual spiritual Part in us, has its rectified, (not disordered,) Nature gratified, with a Good every Way answerable unto it, the Man can never be happy, let the Enjoyments adapted to the Body be what they will; because the pure

(a) 1 *Theff.* v. 23.

Spirit,

Spirit, being the more noble and exalted Part of the Man, will remain destitute, and uneasy, whatever be the Dreams of Happiness, in the fullest Gratifications of the lower Appetites, while this distinguishing Part of us is left unprovided of suitable Entertainments. For since that Part of us which we call Spirit, is so very different in its Nature from our Bodies, as that none of the essential Properties of the Latter are to be found in the Former, it follows, that something very different in its Nature from that which is accommodated to our Bodies, (that is, something, more peculiarly adapted to the Nature of our Spirits than any of the Enjoyments of this World,) must be found out, before we can suppose any Man to be happy in the exact Correspondency of his Nature to the Thing objected to him : Therefore the *Preacher* observes, * *Seeing there are many Things that increase Vanity*, (he means all the Things of this World, which are adapted to our Senses, all of which tend to increase our Vanity, and to disappoint us with their Vanity,) *what is Man the better?* How will these things, which hold no Proportion to his spiritual Nature, add one Grain to his true and real Happiness : *For what hath a Man of all his Labour, and of the Vexation of his Heart, wherein he hath laboured under the Sun?* † Should the Man enjoy all the Creatures, which yet he cannot, he would still want Something that should bear a Correspondence with the Nature of his Spirit, which the Objects of Sense do not. The material World, and an immaterial Spirit, are so widely different, in their Nature, that the former can never be a Foundation for the Happiness of the latter. *Nebuchadnezzar's* grazing among the Beasts was a more exalted Degree of Happiness,

* *Eccl.* vi. 11. † *Eccl.* ii. 22.

to the Body, even of a mighty Monarch, than the fullest Enjoyment of the brightest of the Creatures, can possibly afford to an intellectual Spirit.

In short ; Happiness ever arises from a Likeness, in the Nature of the Thing enjoyed, to the Nature of the Possessor. There must be an Agreement in Sounds to produce an Harmony, and a Proportion in Parts to constitute a Beauty ; and so there must be an Agreement in Nature, with the possessed Object, to create that Harmony and Beauty, in the Soul, which we call Happiness. Even GOD Himself cannot render a reasonable Creature happy, until He has first formed him, in some measure, after His own Likeness. Now, what we generally call the Soul being a pure Spirit, breathed into us by the Almighty, (*for there is a Spirit in Man, and the Inspiration of the Almighty hath given him Understanding (b),*) and the whole visible Creation being formed of the Dust of the Ground, as may be seen in the inspired Account of the Creation (*c*); these Two have no Likeness, Affinity, and therefore can have no such good Agreement between them, as is necessary, in Order to the Enjoyment of the Creature's being capable of completing the Happiness of the Soul.

2. Nor is the Creature proportionable to the Wants of the Soul. The Soul must be possessed of a Good, answerable to its present, and future Circumstances, as well as its Nature, or it can never be happy ; because if the Spirit, or superiour Part in us, is not accommodated with what is every Way agreeable unto its Circumstances, and sufficient to answer its Necessities, it will remain in a State of Want ; and no Man can suppose that Happiness, and Indigences, can meet in the same Beast, at the same Time. There may, indeed, be the want of a

(b) *Job.* xxxii. 8. (c) *Gen.* Ch. i.

Lesser Good, while the Possession of the Greater renders us truly comfortable and far from Misery ; so the Good Man has his Degrees of Happiness, in the Favour of GOD, in the midst of all the Afflictions of the present Life ; and if *the Fig-Tree should not blossom, neither should Fruit be in the Vine ; if the Labour of the Olive should fail, and the Fields yeild no Meat ; if the Flocks should be cut off from the Fold, and there should be no Herd in the Stall ; yet he can rejoice in the LORD, and joy in the GOD of his Salvation (d).* But to compleat Happiness, there is requisite such a full Possession of every needful Good, as that there shall remain no Want unsupplied. For if there be any one Appetite unsatisfied, the Man will be in a State of Indigency, and this will necessarily excite Uneasiness, and interrupt his Felicity. *Haman*, surrounded with all the Honours and Glories of the *Persian Court*, was far from Happiness, while his wicked Soul thirsted after the Blood of poor *Mordecai*, so that he cryed out, * *All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai setting at the King's Gate.* And how much more restless and uneasy must the Soul be, if it's regular Desires remain unsatisfied.

Now let us but consider what the known Wants of the Soul, or supream Spirit in Man, are, and this will afford us a convincing Proof, how disproportionable all the Things of this World are to us. As now,

The Soul, as sinful and polluted, wants to be relieved from the vile Subjection which it is in to Flesh and Sense, and to be reinstated on the Throne of Liberty, and put into a Capacity of acting freely for itself, and it's greatest Interest ; and the Creature is so far from lending an helping Hand

(d) *Hab.* iii. 17, 18. * *Est.* v. 13.

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here, that it treacherously assists in putting the Chains on, and so much the more subjects the Soul under the basest Tokens of Bondage and Slavery. Hence is that Caution of our Saviour, * *Take Heed, and beware of Covetousness.* The greedy Desires of the Things of this World enslave the Soul to them; and so does the heedless and immoderate use of them: hence is that Caution, † *Take Heed to your selves lest at any time your Hearts be overcharged with Surfeiting, &c.*

The Soul wants to be freed from that Guilt, and Horror, she has contracted, by her Fall, and her vicious and sinful Actions; and the *Blood of Bulls and of Goats, Thousands of Rams, and Ten Thousand of Rivers of Oil, and the Fruit of the Body*, added to them, will not be sufficient to make Expiation for the Sin of the Soul (e): but instead thereof they are greatly instrumental to multiply her Crimes, and increase her Guilt: as the Love of the World, and the ill Improvement of it debases the Soul, so do they load the Soul with Remorse, and Guilt, by withdrawing it from the Love of GOD, and Delight in his Commandments.

The Soul wants to be delivered from the Sentence of eternal Condemnation, and rescued from everlasting Burnings, the just Desert, and Wages, of her Crimes; but so precious is the Soul that the Redemption thereof ceaseth for ever, as to any Thing among the mere Creature being a sufficient Ransom therefor; for *we are not redeemed with corruptible Things, as Silver, and Gold,—but with the precious Blood of CHRIST (f)*: and the Creature, by tempting, and drawing the Soul into Sin,

* Luke xii. 15. † Luke xxi. 34. (e) Mic. vi. 7.
(f) 1. Pet. i. 18, 19.

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does but so much the more bring it under the condemning Power of the Law, and doom it to suffer the divine Vengeance.

The Soul wants a suitable Place for it's eternal Residence, that, when it shall be unclothed of its earthly Tabernacle, it may not be left naked, and destitute, but may put on Immortality and possess a Building of God, an House, not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens, accommodated with all possible Delights and Satisfactions ; and what is there in this World, among all the Treasures of it, that can purchase such an happy Seat for her : all the Objects of Sense can neither form such a glorious Mansion for her, nor are fit to give in Exchange therefor, nor can any Way, of themselves, convey her to that blessed Abode : for *eternal Life is the Gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord* (g.)

In short, as all created Nature cannot buy off the Punishment due to the sinful Soul, so neither can it afford the least Support and Comfort to her, under her Wants, which would be her eternal Torment. Mountains of *peruvian* Gold, and Rocks of Diamond, would be looked upon with Horror and Anguish, should they present themselves in the Day of the LORD's Visitation, and but add Oil to the Flames that surround the unhappy Soul ; nay, so far would all Creatures be from affording any Relief to the poor miserable Soul, that they would stand aloof off, as mocking at her Torment, and not a single *Drop of Water* would move to *cool her enflamed Tongue*. (b) So that by no Means would any, or all, of the Creatures be able to supply the Wants of the Soul, and therefore could not render her happy.

(g) *Rom. vi. 23.* (b) *Luke xvi. 24.*

3. Nor is the Creature proportionable to the Desires and Cravings of the Soul. This necessarily follows upon the former Head. For if the Creature is not answerable unto the Wants of the Soul, it cannot possibly fulfil its Desires ; because it will necessarily crave to have its Wants supplied. There is a Sort of Infinity, and Boundlessness, in the Appetites of an intelligent immortal Spirit, which finite Nature, alone, can never satisfy. We see something of the unwearied Restlessness of the Mind of Man, in their perpetual Search and Inquiry into the hidden Mysteries of Nature, and Art, in the constant Labours of Men after the Profits, Pleasures, and Honours of this World ; in their Thirst after perpetual Existence, and their Endeavours to out-live the Grave, in their Name, Manners, and Offspring ; and yet, after they have done all, they are as unsatisfied as ever. Who ever found their most enlarged Stores, the greatest Variety, Degrees, of sensual Gratifications, or the most numerous and glittering Honours they were encircled withal, have been able to set Bounds to their Appetites, that they had, no farther Desires after them : This restless State of the Mind of Man, the *Preacher* elegantly describeth, by a lively Metaphor fetched from the Sun ; (i) *The Sun*, (saith he,) *also ariseth, and the Sun goeth down, and hasteth to the Place where he arose ;* in his daily Motion from *East*, to *West*, he cometh to the same Point again : So the *Sun* (for of this he continueth his Speech, the *Wind* not being in the Original, †) *goeth towards the South*, (to the Southern Tropic,) *and turned about to the North*, (then returns to the Northern Tropic,) *it whirleth about continually*, (in it's annual Motion,)

(i) Eccl. i. 5, 6. † See *Mr. Pool*.

and returneth again according to the Circuits : it cometh to the same Point again, after all it's Revolutions. And as Restless is Man in every Condition of Life, ever seeking to alter his present State, as he thinketh for the better ; yet, after all, he is just where he was, as to any real Rest and Satisfaction, to his Mind, he hath gained by all his Changes. Therefore the *Preacher* observeth, (k) *The Eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the Ear filled with hearing ; for, (as the Royal Instructor had, in the Verse before, elegantly expressed the Unsatisfactoriness, of all Things here below, to the Soul,) All the Rivers run into the Sea, yet the Sea is not full.* The Sea has already more in it self than the Rivers can supply it with, and its Capacity vastly exceeds all that the Rivers can communicate, and therefore it can never be filled by all the Streams that run into it.

Besides, these Things being different in their Nature from what the Soul thirst after, can never yeild any true Satisfaction, and fill her Appetites. 'Till these Temporal Things can change their Nature, and rise up to Spiritual, and Eternal, the Soul can cast them all, unworthy of her Care, or lodge them in a narrow Corner, and never rest satisfied, until the infinite ALL, she bears some Likeness to in her Spirituality, and Immortality, and still has some faint Reaches after, even in this her imperfect State; comes, and fills her, with everlasting Satisfaction.

4. *Finally ;* The Creature is not proportionable to the Soul in Duration. That the Soul is immortal, or endless in Duration, may be fairly argued from the general Sentiments of Mankind, and their natural Desires of Immortality, and from the Powers of Reason, Judgment, and Reflection

(k) Ver. 8.

&c.

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&c. which evidently belong to the humane Nature, and are as evidently different from all the known Properties of Matter, howsoever disposed and moved ; and from our Consciousness of our own Actions, and the Judgment we pass upon them, which sheweth that we are capable of rendering an Account to our supream Ruler and Judge : But after all the sacred Scripture affords us the fullest Evidences of the Soul's Immortality, *Life and Immortality being brought to Light by the Gospel.* There we are told, (l) *They, that kill the Body, are not able to kill the Soul* ; that, when the Body dies, *the Spirit goeth to GOD who gave it* (m) ; and we may observe that, throughout the *New-Testament* especially, the Soul is treated as an immortal Being, in the constant Proposal of future eternal Rewards and Punishments ; and the Assurance it gives us, That, at the Death of their Bodies, the Souls of good Men go, to (n) *Paradise*, to (o) *Heaven*, to (p) *eternal Life*, to (q) *be ever with the LORD* ; and that the Souls of wicked Men go, to (r) *Prison*, to (s) *Hell*, to the *Place of Torment*, to (t) *everlasting Punishment* : All of which clearly evinces the Immortality of the Soul, or, that it existeth forever.

Suppose, now, that the Creature was ever so well adjusted to the Nature of the Soul, being spiritual as that is, and were most admirably suited to its present Wants, and Cravings ; yet, if after all, it falls short of the Nature of the Soul in Duration, This, alone would render it utterly impossible that it should ever compleat our Happiness.

For, whenever the Creature shall run out the

- (l) *Matth. x. 28.* (m) *Eccl. xii. 7.* (n) *Luke xxiii. 43.*
 (o) *Luke vi. 23.* (p) *Mat. xxv. 42.* (q) *1 Thess. iv. 17.*
 (r) *1 Pet. iii. 19.* (s) *Luke xvi. 23.* (t) *2 Thess. i. 9.*

Line of its Continuance, and come to its End, (as I shall shew under another Head, it certainly will) there will then be no Room left for the least Pretensions to Happiness in the Enjoyment of it ; because it will then have no Existence. And, as, in the mean while, the Fears of losing, what, we know, will anon cease to have any Being, would so distress the Soul, in the Midst of her Enjoyments, as to leave her unhappy in the fullest Possessions, so the total ceasing of it, would render her Condition the more miserable, from a Reflection upon her former comfortable State, while she was in Possession of it.

Thus we see, that upon Supposition of a true Enjoyment of the Creature, it cannot compleat our Happiness, because of the vast Disproportion there is between all the Objects of Sense, and a spiritual and immortal Soul : For the Things of this World are proportionable neither to the Nature, the Wants, the Desires, nor the Duration of the Soul.

I proceed now to say,

2. We do not truly and fully enjoy the Creature, and therefore it cannot possibly compleat our Happiness. What I have said under the former Head, of the Disproportion of the Creature to us, holds good upon Supposition of our fullest Enjoyment of it, and I now argue the Insufficiency of the Creature to compleat our Happiness, were it otherwise ever so proportionable to us, in that we have not the true, and full Enjoyment of it.

For, after all our Pretensions to Enjoyment, and the pleasant Dreams of Happiness we flatter and delude ourselves with, in the Possession of it, if our Title be challenged, we shall find that we have no true Right to it, and so do not truly and fully enjoy it. For barely to have in our Hands, and
keeping,

keeping, this or the other desirable Good, is not properly, and fully, to enjoy that Good ; as the Keeper of the Crown is not properly said to enjoy the Crown ; the Fee, and Right, must be in us, and in us solely, to constitute a full Enjoyment, otherwise, our present Possession is dependant, and precarious. Now it is certain, that, whatever our Claim may be, we are not to look upon ourselves as the Lord's Proprietors of what we have, but only Stewards at Will : *the Earth is the LORD's with the Fullness thereof, the World, and they that dwell therein (k).* GOD alone is the rightful Proprietor of all the Creatures ; and because HE is the *great Creator*, therefore is HE also *the most high Possessor* of Heaven and Earth : and this His Right He has not alienated, nor will He devolve it upon another. 'Tis impossible any One of the Creatures should enjoy all the rest ; and those that we have in our Hands cannot render us happy, because we have no true Propriety in them.

With Respect unto Men, our Fellow-Creatures, we may be the sole Owners of this, or that, and they may be guilty of Injustice, and Oppression, by their forcible or crafty invading our Right ; but our Title will not hold good should we attempt to contest it with the Most High. Yea, so far are we from a full Possession of any thing, as that we ourselves are not our own, but belong to, and are dependant upon, that GOD, who hath made us, and formed us for Himself, and in whom we live, and move, and have our being ; so that He has a Right to us, and all that we have.

Nor will our present Possession, such as it is, or our holding any of the Creatures in our Hands, make good our Claim, and Propriety in them, against the Demands of the Almighty ; because we hold all

(k) *Pf. xxiv. 1.*

upon good Pleasure only : so that we are but Stewards to our great Lord and Master, who has committed to our Trust, as pleaseth Him, to some *two*, to others *five*, and to others *ten Talents*, and commanded us to *occupy until He come*, and to improve all in his Service, and to the Honour of His Name ; and to whom, e'er long, we must account for our Stewardship, how we have traded, and what we have gained ; and receive our Rewards according to that we have done (1). Since we are but Stewards, therefore what is put into our present Possession, is not alienated and made over, to us as our own, but our sovereign LORD reserveth unto Himself an unquestionable and full Right, as to the Interest, so to the Principal, of all our Talents, and the Power to take from us what He has lent us, or deposited in our Hands, when it shall seem good unto Him.

Hence it will follow, that the Creature is not, nor can it be, compleative of our Happiness, because we cannot properly call it our own. For, upon Supposition that it were in it's own Nature, ever so perfect in Kinds and Degrees of Excellency, and so were capable of rendring us happy, yet since it is not our own, and we have no unalienable Right and Property in it, what will it signify to us, how good and excellent it is in itself, or how agreeable it might be to us ? Unless there be a Contact, or Union, between the Subject and the Object, there can no delightful Sensations be handed to the Soul : and this Union is founded in Possession and Propriety. We may see That in the Possession of our Neighbour, which, if we could call it our Own, might go a great Way towards the satisfying of our present Wants and Desires, and afford us

(1) See *Mat. xxv. from ver. 14 — 28. and Luke xix. 12 — 27.*

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abundance of Delight and Pleasure, in the Agreeableness of it to us ; but since it is another's, and not ours, though we ought to rejoice in the Welfare of our Neighbour, yet, all the Satisfaction we might propose to ourselves, from the Enjoyment of it drops of Course. The all-perfect *Deity* affords no Happiness to a rational Mind, 'till it can say of this GOD, He is OUR OWN GOD ; but the Want of this is the Misery of the damned who are sufficiently acquainted with the Perfections of GOD, to know that there is enough in Him to compleat the Happiness of any, or all, of His Creatures, but yet find themselves miserable in their Separation from Him, or want of an Union to Him as their GOD, and Portion.

Thus, because we have no true Right, and Propriety, in the Creature, 'tis vain for us to expect Happiness from it ; and though we ought to be contented with the present Portion our bountiful Master has assigned us, and be thankful to Him for it, because the least we have the Improvement of, is more than we deserve, yet, we cannot think seriously of the Weakness of our Title to it, and at how uncertain a Tenour we hold it, but it marrs all the fine Schemes of Happiness a sensual Mind may be apt to propose to himself from it.

Só that we see an End of all Perfection, in the Creature ; it's greatest Excellency is limited in it's Nature and Measure, whether we consider it abstractedly by itself, or in it's Relation to us.

I am now,

2. In the second Place, to show, that the Perfection of the Creature is finite in it's Duration. There will be an End to all worldly Perfection.

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I hinted at this before, in shewing that the Creature is not proportionable to the Soul in Duration, and the daily Experience we have of this renders it less necessary to insist largely upon this Head : I shall therefore but briefly run it over, and shew, that if there were a Perfection of Number, and Degrees, of Excellencies in the Creature, yet it would fall short of proper Perfection, for Want of Duration. True Perfection admits of no Limits in Duration, any more than in Degrees ; for that which is finite in its Duration, wants a very essential Ingredient in Perfection, namely Continuance, or constant Existence : though it have an Existence at present, yet if, by and by, it shall have none, this shews that there is wanting to it that which is necessary to it's very Being, and that which wanteth cannot be perfect. And this is the Case with the Creature, with all the Things of this lower World, we converse with, they are finite in their Duration. For,

1. The Creature it self will have an End, and then the Excellency of it ceaseth, and is no more. As this World had a Beginning, so it will have an End, and shall not continue always. Whether Matter perishes, or any, the least, Part thereof be utterly destroyed, or no, is not at all material to us, because the Form is all we are conversant about, in Objects of Sense ; Though I see no Absurdity in the absolute Corruptibility of Matter, which once had no Being. However, since the Form gives Being to every Object of Sense, and the Existence of Matter strip'd of all Form, (if such a Thing can be,) would be utterly imperceptible to us, therefore when ever the Creature puts off its present Form, with Respect unto us, it then comes to an End. Thus
the

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the Apostle tells us (*m*) *the Fashion of this World passeth away*; by which he means so to affect us with the Consideration of the fading, perishing, Nature of the Things of this World, as to draw us off from that over-fond Opinion we are so prone to entertain of the Objects of Sense, that we may not have our Hearts too much set upon them. And we may plainly see, that all Things about us are hastening on to the Change of their present Posture, and Relation, and the Time is coming, *in the which the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat, and the Earth, with the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up*: as the Apostle Peter acquaints us (*n*). Decay is written, in indelible Characters, upon all the Beauty, and Excellency, of this visible World, and we see it daily making Advances upon all Things about us. The very *Heavens wax old as doth a Garment* (*o*), and a little Time often puts a Period to the brightest Lustre of this World. What is become of the flourishing States, and Kingdoms, the magnificent Structures, and the applauded Heroes, which, some few Ages ago struck the World with Wonder and Admiration? They have all sunk in the Ruins of Time. - Where are our dear Friends, and valuable Relations, that, a little while ago, we took Comfort in? alas; they are buried under the Clods of the Valley! and their Excellency, which they once had, has perished with them. So does the Perfection of this World, like *Riches, make to itself Wings, and flee away, as an Eagle towards Heaven*, with a swift, and almost imperceptible Motion.

But then,

2. We ourselves shall, e'er long, come to the

(*m*) 1. Cor. vii. 31. (*n*) 2 Pet. iii. 10. (*o*) Psal. cii. 26.

End

End of our Continuance in this World. For we cannot live here always ; 'tis but a little while we can remain in the delightful Possession of our present worldly good Things ; our Houses, and Lands, our Riches, and Honours, our Friends, and Acquaintance, we must quickly take our final Leave of them all, and the Eye that hath seen us shall see us no more and the Places that have known us shall know us no more. *Our Days on Earth are as a Shadow, and there is none abiding (p). What is your Life ? It is even a Vapour, that appeareth a little while, and then vanisheth away (q).* Even while we are here, the Excellency which we pretend to, as giving us the Precedency to the Creatures around us, often decays, and fades away ; and a Man of Wisdom, and Strength, in a few Years becomes as a Child in Weakness, and Folly ; and a Man of Wealth, and Honour, may, anon, be as poor as *Job*, and despised as *Lazarus*. But however, it will not be long before Death will put a final Period to our Abode on Earth, and we shall lie down in the silent Grave, and the Worms feed sweetly upon us, and then, *the Beauty which we have shall consume away in the rotting Grave (r).* And when we go down to the dark Vault, the House appointed for all the living, we shall then have no further Occasion for any of the Enjoyments of this World, nor reap any Advantage from them ; for, *we can carry Nothing out of this World with us, nor will our Glory descend after us (s) ;* but as *we came naked into this World*, without bringing any of the Accommodations of it with us, so *naked shall we return (t) :* The Thought of which made *Solomon* inscribe Vanity upon all

(p) 1 Cor. xxix. 15. (q) Jam. iv. 14. (r) Ps. xlix. 14.

(s) Ps. xlix. 17. (t) Job. i. 21.

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Things under the Sun ; *Yea, I hated my Labour,* (says he,) *because I should leave it unto the Man that should come after me* (v). And of what Avail will all the Profits, Pleasures, or Honours, of this World be to us, when we are at last forced to take our Leave of them ? Ah ! vain World ! Whose greatest Excellency, as in a Moment, vanisheth from us, or dies with us !

Thus I have finished the First Doctrine, That the Perfection of the Creature is limited and finite ; it is not proper Perfection, nor can it continue ; and so we see an End of all Perfection.

Before I proceed to the Second Doctrine, it will be proper to make some Improvement of this, and apply it unto ourselves, for our Instruction, Correction, and Exhortation.

USE I. This Doctrine may be improved for our Instruction, and Information, in several Things. To name one at present, and conclude.

1. Hence we may learn, what Reason we have to mourn over our Apostacy from GOD, as the grand Cause of very much of the Imperfection of the Creature. For it is certain, that very much of the Imperfection of the Creature is accidental to it, and has been procured, originally, by our Sin and Fall from GOD. As the Creature, with us, first came out of the Hands of our Maker, it was suited to our pure and innocent Nature, so far as Man could, then, have any Desires about it, and would have been abundantly more advantageous, and serviceable, to him, in his Integrity, than it can be to us, now, in our lapsed State : and we find it a Part of the Curse, which the great GOD denounc-

(v) *Ecc. ii. 18.*

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ed in the Day of our Apostacy, (*w*) *Cursed is the Ground, for thy Sake ; in Sorrow shalt thou Eat of it, all the Days of thy Life : Thorns also and Thistles shall it bring forth unto thee,—in the Sweat of thy Face shalt thou eat Bread, 'till thou return unto the Ground ; for out of it wast thou taken ; for Dust thou art, and unto Dust shalt thou return.* By Means of this Curse there is a Sort of Variance put between Man and the Creature, and this Vanity is consequent upon it, that our Appetites and Desires are irregularly carried out after it, and there is nothing in it sufficient to satisfy them ; and after we have walked in a vain Shew, for a little while, we must bid Adieu to all sublunary Enjoyments, without so much as allowing us Room to hope that they will ever be any further serviceable to us.

The Earth was a Paradise to Man, in Innocency, a Garden of Delight, and Pleasure, because every Way suited to all that he could want from it, and answerable to all the Desires he could have about it, and because of the high Propriety which he had in it. For innocent Man was not subject to many of those Wants, which now distress us, nor could he have any of those irregular Appetites after the Objects of Sense, which now are the Reproach of our Reason, nor have any Expectations from the World but what it was able to answer ; and therefore there was a proper Agreement between them, and the Creature so far perfectly suited his rational and religious Thoughts of it, and was improvable by him to the noblest Ends and Purposes. Besides, what rendered the Creature more perfect to him was, the true Propriety which he had in it. For, as he saw and adored GOD in the Creature, so he enjoyed it in GOD, and GOD in it ; thus the Creator, and the Creature,

(*w*) *Gen. iii. 17, 18, 19.*

ever

ever came together, in his View, and Enjoyment ; and while there was a close Union between GOD, and the Works of His Hand, a Union not yet broken by Sin, as Man, then, had a Propriety in GOD, as his own GOD, so had he in the Creature also.

But, now, our Fall from GOD hath broken this Union, has separated between GOD and the Creature, has strip'd the Creature of much of its Excellency, and filled us with Desires, and Expectations, which it can never answer, and so has turned the Blessing into a Curse. 'Tis This that has rendred this World a Wilderness of Briars and Thorns, and filled it with Vanity, and Vexation of Spirit: So that the Creature *was made subject to Vanity, not willingly, (not by any natural Propensity) but by the Will of Him who hath subjected the same, (though) in Hope, as the Punishment of Sin ; the Creature being in the Bondage of Corruption ; to be delivered from which, the Creation groaneth and travaileth in Pain until now (x).*

This then shews us, what Reason* we have to mourn over our Apostacy and Rebellion against GOD, which have procured so much of the Imperfection of the Creature, and rendred it so unprofitable, and ensnaring, to us. It should make us to cry out, *Ob ! that our Head were Water, and our Eyes a Fountain of Tears, that we might weep Day and Night, for the Offence offered unto GOD, the Injury done unto the Creature, and the Damage brought upon ourselves, by our very great Folly, in refusing to obey the Divine Commandment. This ought to be Matter of perpetual, and deep Humiliation to us, as often as we see the Weakness, the Insufficiency, and Instability, of the Creature, that it groans under the*

(x) Rom. viii. 20, 21, 22.

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Curse we have brought upon it, and that we ourselves so constantly feel the sad Effects of it. 'Tis this that furnishes every Thing we converse with, with the Sting that pierces and wounds us. 'Tis This is the Root of Bitterness, the baneful Tincture whereof has turned all our Enjoyments into Gall and Wormwood. The Creature was full of Beauty, and Honour, glittered with the Sparkles of divine Light upon it, would have afforded us wonderful Refreshment, and Satisfaction, and was an Enjoyment with which GOD might have been abundantly glorified, as well as we ourselves greatly delighted, but our Sin has stained the Glory of the Divine Workmanship, robbed GOD of His Due, the Creature of its Excellency, and our selves of Comfort; and it ought therefore forever to humble and abase us, and fill us with Brokenness of Soul, to think of our high Crime, in defiling our Nature, and throwing the whole Creation into Disorder and Confusion. Well therefore may we cry out, (y) *The Crown is fallen from our Head; wo unto us that we have sinned.*

(y) *Lam. v. 16.*



SERMON



S E R M O N III.

P S A L M CXIX. 96.

I have seen an End of all Perfection ; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

TWO Doctrines have been raised from these Words, as evidently contained in them, viz.

Doc. I. The Perfection of the Creature is limited and finite.

Doc. II. The Commandment of GOD is exceeding broad.

The first of these has been already spoken to, and I have shewed you,

I. The Perfection of the Creature is limited in its Nature and Measure ; if we view the Creature abstractedly, we shall see that no One possesses all possible Excellencies, nor any one Excellency in every possible Degree, and a finite Mind may comprehend the utmost of Creature-Perfection ; or if we examine the Creature in its Relative Excellency, especially to Man, we shall find that it cannot perfect our Nature, neither in the Knowledge, Enjoyment, or Improvement of it ; nor is

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it

Handwritten flourish

50 *The Imperfection* Serm. III.

it capable of compleating our Happiness ; because it is not proportionable to us, neither to our Nature, nor to our Wants, nor to our Desires, nor to our Duration ; nor do we truly and fully enjoy the Creature, but hold it only at the Pleasure of another, to whom it originally belongeth, and in whose Right it remaineth. I have also,

II. Shewed you, That the Perfection of the Creature is finite in its Duration. For the Creation it self will anon come to an End, and its Excellency flee away ; and we ourselves shall quickly come to the End of our Continuance in this World. Having thus proved this Doctrine, I told you it was improvable to our Instruction, Correction, and Exhortation ; and under the first of these I have inferred, what Reason we have to mourn over our Apostacy from GOD, as the grand Cause of very much of the Imperfection of the Creature : And now I proceed to improve this Doctrine to our further Instruction.

Wherefore,

2. Hence we may learn, that we ought not to be chiefly concerned about the Things of this World. If we may see an End of all Perfection, as to the Creature ; if it will neither perfect our Nature, nor make us truly happy, nor abide with us ; then certainly the Things of this World have not a Sufficiency of Worth, and Value in them, to demand all our Expence, and Labour, nor ought they to have the chief of our Thought, and Care, employed about them. It is enough that our Thought, and Labour, are employed about these Things, according as our daily Task is, that we be diligent in our Business, and not Drones in the Common-Wealth, who live upon the Labour of others ; that we have our Minds so far engaged
about

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about our temporal Affairs, as is consistent with our Eye steadily fixed upon our main Business ; and thus serve GOD, and promote our spiritual Interest, while we are at work about our particular Calling : Thus (i) *sufficient unto the Day is the Evil thereof*, and we need not to make the Evil greater, by suffering our selves to be wholly, or chiefly, concerned for the Body, and the Things thereof ; much less, what shall be on the Morrow. We see, indeed, a very great Part of Mankind so entirely charmed with the Objects of Sense, and devoted to their Service, that all their Love, and Joy, all their Care, and Concern, center in them ; and while the Men of a lower Figure are in a perpetual Hurry and Bustle to raise their Fortune, and scarce afford themselves Time to eat, or sleep, and will not boggle at any Methods to increase their Stock, that they may make them a Name, and a Family in the Earth, the Men of the most elevated Figure, are often, at the same Time, immersing themselves in a continual Succession of sensual Pleasures, torturing themselves for the Invention of new and fresher Ones, and racking themselves with the Fears lest another should enjoy more than they do, or should get a Step before them in the Race of worldly Honour : So that the Cares of this World, and deceitful Riches, take up the Thought, Labour, and Time, of the Generality of Men, as if they were made for nothing else. But how mean, and foolish, is this ? How much below, and unbecoming the Dignity of our Nature is it ? For certainly, as rational Creatures, we ought to give the Preference to that which is of most Value in itself, and of the greatest Consequence to us ; and therefore to be constantly reaching after a State of Perfection, both of Purity and Happiness, to be

(i) *Matth. vi. 34.*

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most thoughtful and concerned how, and in what Way this may be attained by us.

If, indeed, the Perfection of our Nature, and our State, were to be gained, purely, by the Enjoyments of this World, there would be something to be said, for the Reason of Men's present Conduct ; but since we see to the End of all Perfection, in Things here below, we plainly discern that they are limited both in their Measure and Duration, and we experience that neither the Knowledge, the Enjoyment, nor the Improvement of them, will lead us unto true Perfection, but leave us as far from true Rectitude, and real Felicity, as ever ; we ought therefore to have but a more transient Regard to them, and keep Things, that are of greater Worth and Moment, chiefly in our View, and make the lesser Concerns of the Objects of Sense subservient unto them. Hence the *Apostle* gives us that wholesome Advice, couched in the Representation of his own Practice, (y) *We look not at the Things which are seen, but at the Things which are not seen ; for the Things that are seen, are Temporal, but the Things that are not seen are Eternal.* Temporal Things hold no Proportion with Eternal ones ; and because the Things of this World, which we are apt mostly to concern our selves about, are but Temporal, and this Imperfection ever attends them, that *the Grace of the Fashion thereof passeth away*, therefore 'tis highly reasonable that we should not fix our Minds upon them, and make them the Mark and Scope we aim at in all that we do. For what will signify all our Attainments and Possessions, our acquired Endowments, our increased Riches, and advanced Honours ? If this be all the Portion we have laid up for our selves ; if we have nothing else to trust to,

(y) 2 Cor. iv. 18.

and

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and depend upon, for our Comfort, when we are about to depart out of this World, into the invisible World, we shall find our selves miserably provided for at last ; and, when our eternal State comes on, there will not be left to us so much as One of all the Delights of Sense, to administer to our Necessities, and afford us any Relief.

'Tis very great Meanness and Folly, therefore, in Persons, to have no higher Views than their Bodies, and the Things that relate to the present Life ; it is greatly beneath them, as rational Beings, and reduces them upon a Level with the Brute Creatures, who are wholly governed by their Senses, and follow the Motions of their Appetites, without any higher Principle to direct them ; and it is very great Folly, because when they have done all, and raised themselves to the utmost Height of temporal Enjoyments, they are really never the better for them, while they possess them ; neither will their irregular Appetites be cured, nor their Desires satisfied, by them ; and, for all that they can tell, they may, within a very little While, be striped of them all : and then what Pleasure will they afford them ? Were we advanced to the highest Pitch of Grandeur, and become the Darlings of the admiring Croud ; could we heap up Stores, 'till we were able to purchase the *Indies* ; and were we daily entertained with all the Delights created Nature could yield us ; yet the native and relative Imperfection of all would still leave the Soul unsatisfied, and in a State of Want and Uneasiness ; the Result of all would be that, (z) *He that loveth Silver, shall not be satisfied with Silver ; nor he that loveth Abundance, with Increase.* Then certainly we

(z) Eccl. v. 10.

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ought to be less sedulous and careful about such empty and perishing Enjoyments, and have our Minds more seriously concerned about Things of greater Consequence to us, about our never-dying Souls, and our eternal Interest ; for these are Things of the greatest and nearest Importance to us, in which all that is dear to us is enwrapped, on which our eternal Well-Being turns ; and therefore we cannot be too much in earnest to save our Souls, and get to Heaven, by making our Peace with GOD, through Faith in CHRIST, and a Life of Obedience ; but it is vain to lavish away all, or the chief of our Care and Industry, to so little Purpose, as the best Accommodations in this World, and, at the same Time, foolishly neglect eternal Things, which are of everlasting Importance to us. The *Apostle* therefore directs us, (a) to *seek those Things which are above, where CHRIST sitteth at the right Hand of GOD ; to set our Affections on Things above, not on Things on the Earth.*

This should put us upon the most earnest Endeavours, and unweary'd Prayers, to the GOD and Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, that we may obtain the Graces of the Divine Spirit in our Hearts, and to make sure of an heavenly Inheritance, as our Portion forever ; because these will heal the Disorders of our Souls, and afford us abundant Satisfaction here, and render us compleatly happy hereafter. Hence we have that Advice of our Saviour, (b) *Lay not up for yourselves Treasures upon Earth, where Moth and Rust doth corrupt ; and where Thieves break through, and steal ; but lay up for your selves Treasure in Heaven, where neither Moth nor Rust doth corrupt, and where Thieves do not break through, nor steal :*

(a) Col. iii. 1, 2. (b) Matth. vi. 19, 20, 33.

Seek

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— *Seek first the Kingdom of GOD, and His Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.*

3. Hence we may see, what little Reason we have to put our Trust in the Creature. It was the Injunction laid upon *Timothy*, by the Apostle *Paul*, (c) *Charge them that are rich in this World, that they trust not in uncertain Riches, but in the living GOD.* GOD only, and not the Creature, is the proper Object of our Trust and Dependance. And yet we are prone to imagine that there is an higher Degree of Excellency in the Creature, than, upon Examination, we shall find, and thence are foolishly led to put our Trust in it, and look for great Things from it. But, may we see an End of all Perfection? Then certainly this World, and the Things of it, are unworthy of our Trust and Dependance, because they will certainly deceive us. Indeed, *every Creature of GOD is good, and ought to be received, by us, with Thanksgiving*; nevertheless, we have very little Reason to trust in what is not truly excellent in it self, and so is unworthy our Dependance, and what is much more relatively imperfect, and therefore but a sandy Foundation for us to build our Hopes upon. *Put not your Trust in Princes, nor in the Son of Man, in whom there is no Help: His Breath goeth forth, he returneth to his Earth; that very Day his Thoughts perish.** Let us descend a little into Particulars.

1. The Creature will not support us under the various Troubles we meet withal while we are in this World: No not our outward ones. We find, by sad Experience, that, as our Days on Earth are but few, so, they are full of Trouble. The World we live in is full of Changes, and many

(c) 1 Tim. vi. 17, * Pf. cxlvi. 3, 4.

are the Sorrows we meet with which the most excellent of the Creatures cannot prevent ; and how little a Way do they go towards the keeping of our Hearts from fainting, in the Day of Adversity ? *Their Silver, and their Gold shall not be able to deliver them, in the Day of the Wrath of the LORD ; they shall not satisfy their Souls, neither fill their Bowels,* said the Prophet Ezekiel (d). We often find the Things of the World are the Causes, and Occasions, of our being in Heaviness, and filled with weeping and mourning : The Hardships, and Toil we are put to, in our Pursuit after them, the Anguish they give us, when our Affairs are perplexed and embarrassed, the Anxiety of our Minds how to keep them, and the exquisite Pain they bring upon us, in our parting with them, plainly shew us, that the greatest Part of the Afflictions that befall us arise from the Objects of Sense ; but how seldom do we find any of them stepping in to our Relief, when we are ready to sink under our Burdens. So that if our Hope were only from these Things, our Condition would be truly miserable, notwithstanding all the Help we could have from them.

But then, alas ! what will all these Things avail us under the Convictions of an awakened Conscience, and that inward, and Soul-Trouble, which arises from a quick Sense of our Sin and Guilt. And yet something of this we have felt, or must feel, as ever we hope to obtain the Forgiveness of our Sins, and to be brought to that true Repentance, which is unto Salvation. The wise Man informs us, (e) *That the Spirit of a Man will sustain his Infirmary ; but a wounded Spirit who can bear ?* The Vigour and Chearfulness of the Mind will enable a Man to bear up, pretty well, under

(d) Ezek. vii. 19. (e) Prov. xviii. 14.

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the common Calamities, and Accidents, of the present Life ; but when once the Strength, and Vigour of the Mind is broke in upon, and the quick Sense of Guilt has deprived it of its inward Peace, and Comfort, it is not in the Power of all the gaudy Honours, the deceitful Riches, nor the enticing Pleasures of this World, to sooth and calm the Soul, and restore solid Joy and Quietness unto it. No ; nothing can quiet such a Soul, but either a sinking into a perfect Stupidity, which will raise a greater Storm in the End, or else some probable Hopes of the pardoning Mercy of GOD, through the Merits of JESUS CHRIST our Lord.

2. *Again ;* How little will all these Things avail us in the Day of Death ? When the Harbingers of Death appear before us, we are very ready to betake our selves to the Creature for Help ; (and we do well to make Use of the best Means we can, that, if possibly, we may ward off the coming Blow) but if the Sentence is passed, and we find our Life draws nigh to the Edges of the Grave, our Strength is failing us, our Breath is departing from us, and our Feet are stumbling upon the dark Mountains ; will the Creature then be able to save us from falling, or pluck us back from the Gates of the Grave ? No certainly ; they will all then be miserable Comforters, Physicians of no Value to us, and vain will be all our Expectations from them. For, as the *Psalmist* observes, (f) *They that trust in their Wealth, and boast themselves in the Multitude of their Riches ; none of them can, by any Means, redeem his Brother, ---- that he should still live forever, and not see Corruption : for he seeth that wise Men die, likewise the Fool, and the brutish Person, perish, and leave their Wealth*

(f) *Pf.* xlix. 6, ---- 19.

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to others : ---- like Sheep they are laid in the Grave, Death shall feed upon them, ---- and their Beauty shall consume in the Grave. ---- Though whilst he lived, he blessed his Soul : and Men will praise thee when thou dost well to thyself : he shall go to the Generation of his Fathers, they shall never see Light. The most fervent Affection, and tender Embraces, of the dearest Friends, will not be able to screen us, nor their most importunate Entreaties obtain a Release for us ; Death will be hardened against all their Fondness, and deaf to all their Cries ; the ablest Physicians, and the richest Cordials, will have no Power to retain our flying Spirits ; nor will our Bags of Silver, and Gold, and our sparkling Jewels, be sufficient to bribe the grim Officer, nor the whole Creation to save us from the Arrest of the King of Terrors. Nothing will exempt us from paying the last Debt to Nature, *neither is there any Discharge in this War* (g). There is not one of us all but what must take our Turn, to fall down slain in this War, as innumerable have done before us. *Man dieth, and wasteth away ; yea, Man giveth up the Ghost, and where is he ? As the Waters fail from the Sea, and the Flood decayeth, and drieth up ; so Man lieth down, and riseth not till the Heavens be no more.* (b)

3. *Once more ;* How insignificant will the Creature be to him in the Day of Judgment ? When the Man comes to stand a Trial, before the awful Tribunal of the great GOD, the supream Judge of all, as, e'er long, he certainly must, which of all the Creatures will then rise up, and appear on his Behalf, and effectually plead his Cause, and secure him from all Harm ? Yea, will his boon Companions, the Partners of his Crimes, then have the Face to plead, in Excuse for him, such Things

(g) *Ecc. viii. 8.* (b) *Job xvi. 10, 11, 12.*

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as they now think to be very witty and unanswerable ; or to turn off the Judge with an unmannerly Sneer, as they now can their vertuous Reprover ? Alas ! those mighty Hectors will be seized with an unusual Trembling, and Astonishment take hold upon them, for Fear of their own Punishment, which they can see no Way of escaping. Or will the Man's worldly Possessions interpose, and screen him from the Resentments of his Judge ? Alas ! Those Trifles have no Place in that awful Presence. Or can any Man fetch a Plea, from the Creature, sufficient to wipe off his Guilt, to acquit him from Condemnation, and render him acceptable unto his Judge ? Alas ! they will all fail him, and say it is not in me. For, *Riches profit not in the Day of Wrath,* (i). Our most profound Learning, and piercing Wit, will not be sufficient to palliate and cover our Crimes from the View of our Judge, or to find a Non-Suit in our Case, or bring us off by challenging the Jurisdiction of the Court. And though we should be able to say, and prove it, that we have heretofore been accounted the Great Ones of the Earth, and have sat at the Head of Nations and Kingdoms, have worn the Badges of Honour, and Ensigns of Power, and have possessed a very large Share of the Enjoyments of the present Life, and glittered in gaudy Accoutrements, in Embroideries of Gold, bespangled with Diamonds ; yet all of this will procure no Respect to our Persons, before the righteous Tribunal of that GOD, with whom the Prince and the Beggar are alike, as to their Persons, and differ only according to their Works. For *the Father, without Respect of Persons, judgeth according to every Man's Work.* (k)

(i) Prov. xi. 4. (k) 1 Pet. i. 17.

4. Finally ;

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4. *Finally* ; What Relief can the Creature afford to the Soul, under the Impressions of the Wrath of an angry GOD, in the Place of Torment ? Will any of the Excellencies of the Creature then step in, and support a miserable Soul, weltering under the Horrors of an enraged Conscience, and the insupportable Weight of the Divine Anger, and render his Condition easy to him ? Will their united Force be able to rescue him from the strong Hands of incensed Justice, or pluck him out of the Midst of devouring Flames ? Or can they possibly fill his Mouth with Songs, and his Heart with Rejoicing, while the never-dying Worm gnaws, and everlasting Burning preys upon him ? To which of all the Creatures will he turn, and say, This same shall comfort me ? Or will it be any thing of Comfort, to such an one, to call to mind his former State of Grandeur, of Affluence, and Ease ; that he wallowed in Pleasures, while People and Nations bowed down at his Feet : Nay ! will it not be said to him, as a Part of his Punishment, as *Abraham* to *Dives* ? *(1) Son, Remember that, in thy Life-time, thou hadst thy good Things ; but now thou art tormented !* A sad Remembrance indeed ! The very Reflection upon his former Enjoyments will increase his Misery upon him, and the more, when he shall bethink himself, how he came by them, and what Improvement he made of them ; yea, his Torment will be so much the greater, by how much, in his Life-time, he trusted in them, and now, to his Cost, he finds they are utterly unable to help him.

II. The second Use of this Doctrine may be for Conviction and Reproof, to all such as seek for

(1) *Luke* xvi. 25.

Happiness

Serm. III. *of the Creature.* 61

Happiness in the Creature, or that abuse the Creature to ill Intents and Purposes.

1. This affords Conviction and Reproof to those who seek for Happiness in the Creature. And how many are there that fall under Rebuke, who live, in this World, as if Perfection and Happiness were no where else to be attained, but in the Enjoyment of the Creature? This present World, they think, has a sufficient Fulness in it to render them truly happy; and here, therefore, they fix their Affections, and level their Aims, and look for no higher Degrees of Felicity, than what the Things about them can yield to them. Hence they turn every Stone, rise early, and sit up late, and are ever hunting, with an eager Chace, after the Enjoyments of Sense; and, while they are in the hot Pursuit, often leap over the Boundaries of Religion, and even Humanity, and stick at nothing, how mean and base and dishonourable soever it may be, so that they can but seize the Prey, and get what they account enough of the World. And there are, especially, two Sorts of Persons, who yet agree in one, the Covetous and the Unrighteous, that evidently place their Happiness in Things here below, who fall under Rebuke.

1. The covetous Worldling has set his Heart upon the Creature, and looks for his Happiness in the Enjoyment of it. Why else has the World his Heart? Why does he mind nothing but earthly Things? but because he has made the World his God. He has no Love to the Father, because the Love of the World bears the Sway in him, and leaves no Room for GOD, and RELIGION, in his Heart and Actions; so that he can part with his Soul, with Heaven, and with GOD himself, for the Sake of the World. He finds that he
cannot

cannot serve two Masters, and he is for cleaving to the Objects of Sense, which seem to him to bring a present Reward with them, and slight the invisible GOD, whose Rewards, he thinks, if any, are out of Sight. Hence we see the covetous Man, from the Fondness of his Affections to the World, sometimes even begrudging himself the moderate Use of what he possesses, that though *he wanteth nothing for his Soul of all that he desireth, yet GOD giveth him not Power to eat thereof (m)*: So there is one alone, and there is not a Second; yea, he hath neither Child, nor Brother, yet is there no End of all his Labour, neither is his Eye satisfied with Riches, neither saith he, for whom do I labour, and hereave my Soul of Good * ? And yet if any Thing be demanded of him, for the Service of GOD, or his Neighbour, in Works of Piety and Charity, it is like pouring out of his Heart's Blood for him to part with it. His Thought, and Time, are so taken up about those Things that are on the Earth, that he can find no Leisure to attend upon the Duties he owes to GOD, and his own Soul; he can't find Time to go alone, and read the Word of GOD, and pray to him; he has no spare Minutes to worship the Lord in his Family; and it is with Regret that he is forced to lay aside the World, and wait upon GOD, in his House, upon his holy Day. Hence the Calls and Offers of the Gospel are made light of by him, because of the Cares of the Farm, and the Merchandise (n). Yea, his Covetousness will put him upon selling of his Master, as Judas did, for a little Pelf, and a worldly Spirit in him is often the Parent of the most horrid and unnatural Crimes; *For the Love of Money is the Root of all Evil, (o)* " and the overvaluing of it

(m) Eccl. vi. 2. * Eccl. iv. 8. (n) Matth. xxii. 5. (o) 1 Tim. vi. 10.

Serm. III. *of the Creature.* 63

“ makes People haughty and barbarous, and false both to GOD and Man :” And thus, for the Sake of the World, he loses his Soul and Heaven for ever. 'Tis evident that this Man seeks for Happiness in the Creature, because his Heart is entirely set upon it ; for *where a Man's Treasure, his Happiness, is, there his Heart will be also* *. And is this indeed to act the Part of a Man ? Dost thou glory in thy Reason, as distinguishing of thee from the Brute, and yet wilt thou herd among them, and be led and governed by Sense, as they are, and be concerned for no higher Degrees of Felicity than what arises from sensible Objects ? How just is it in GOD to say to thee, *Be it as thou wilt*, and assign thee thy Portion where thou hast sought it, and put thee off with the mean low Gratifications of the animal Life, and seclude thee forever from the pure, refined, sublime Joys of the heavenly State, which thou hast no Desires after, nor Relish for ? Verily, *No covetous Person shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.* (p)

2. The unrighteous Person places his Happiness in the Creature. It is very evident that he seeks for Perfection and Happiness in worldly Enjoyments, because he can willingly risk every Thing else for the Sake of them ; and therefore can allow himself to violate the Laws of GOD, which forfeits his real Happiness, by his dealing unrighteously with his Neighbour, that he may gain the World. Hence we often see the unrighteous Person can please himself in being guilty of the most violent Oppression upon his Neighbour ; and forcibly rend from him, what, he cannot but know, notwithstanding all his false Claims, he has no just Right to ; and, though he pretends a

* *Mat. vi. 21. (p) 1 Cor. vi. 10.*

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mighty Regard to Justice, yet he can pervert the Law it self, by taking the Advantage of some little Form and Modality of it, to trick another out of his Interest, to his manifest Hurt and Damage. Hence the unrighteous Person can allow himself in Extortion, by griping Usury, by imposing upon the Ignorance, Weakness, or Necessity of his Neighbour, to make a greater Gain of him than he ought to do. Hence, he sometimes openly, and otherwhiles secretly, robs and steals from his Neighbour, and deals treacherously and deceitfully, with false Weights and Measures, and false Accounts, and makes no Bones of breaking his Word and Promise, falsifying the Trust reposed in him: And sometimes proceeds even to murder his Neighbour, that he may secure his Money. All of these Ways of Unrighteousness, are the sad Fruits and Effects of the prevailing Influence which the World has over Men. 'Tis because the Man thinks, that all his Happiness lies in his having an Abundance of these Things, that he has so little Regard to Right, or Wrong, to Justice or Injustice, so he may but enrich himself with them; though such often find it sadly verify'd upon them, that what they thought to be the nearest Way to enrich themselves, has in Reality proved the furthest from it: So the Curse of GOD is fulfilled upon them, *(q)* *He that oppresseth the Poor, to increase his Riches, shall surely come to want: And the flying Roll shall enter into the House of the Thief, and it shall remain in the midst of his House, and shall consume it, with the Timber thereof, and the Stones thereof* *(r)*; a secret Blast from GOD, upon their Undertakings and Labours, consumes their Substance, and they are poor, and low, and despised, after all.

(q) Prov. xxii. 16. *(r)* Zach. v. 2, 4.

Certainly

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Certainly then, their Sin and Folly is to be reproved. For if we may *see an End of all Perfection*, then all those, who so place their Happiness in the Creature, will, sooner, or later, find themselves to have been greatly imposed upon, and that they have themselves been accessory to the Cheat, by looking for that in the Creature, which was not in it. All their Possessions are, at best, but *uncertain Riches*, and whoever aims at Perfection and Happiness, in the Enjoyment of them, will in the Conclusion, experience to his Sorrow, that he has made use of a deceitful Bow, which has carried his Shafts vastly wide of the Mark, and disappointed his Expectation; though they look ever so fair and promising, while we view them at a Distance, yet, to those that trust in them, and found their Hopes upon them, they will only prove, like the tempting Apple to our Grandmother *Eve*, hurtful and destructive: they will, not only as certainly baulk their Hopes, but, leave them as miserable, in the End, as they did the rich Fool, in the Gospel, (s.) who said unto himself, *Soul, take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry, thou hast Goods laid up for many Years, when GOD said to him, Thou Fool, this Night thy Soul shall be required of thee; and then whose shall all these Things be which thou hast provided?* For, as the Partridge setteth upon Eggs, and hatcheth them not, so he that getteth Riches, and not by Right, shall leave them in the Midst of his Days, and at his End shall be a Fool (t). As his Folly is great, so is his Sin, in seeking for Happiness in the Things of this World, because this is no other than to set up the Creature in the Throne of GOD, and so to be guilty of that *Covetousness, which*

(s) *Luk. xii. 19, 20.* (t) *Jer. xvii. 11.*

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is Idolatry (v), which will bring a Damnation that slumbereth not.

2. This affords Conviction and Reproof to all such as make an ill Use of, and abuse, the Creature. Though the Creature is not, of itself, perfective of our Nature, nor compleative of our Happiness, yet, by the Blessing of GOD, it may be improved by us, as a Mean, to further these great Ends, by leading of us, from the Streams, to the Fountain Head: and this is what, as rational Agents, we should ever have in our View, and make our principal Design, in our Use of the Good Things of this Life. But while we abuse the Creature, and make an ill Use of it, we pervert this grand Intention, and do but so much the more blemish and degrade our Nature, and fix it under its greatest Imperfections; and so become guilty of very great Sin and Folly in abusing the Creature, and ourselves with it. And so do all they, who improve what they have of the World to no higher End and Purpose than the indulging of their Lusts, and complying with their sensual Appetites: These dishonour the Name of GOD, which is manifested in, and by, His Creatures; and greatly hurt and injure themselves, by pampering their carnal and fleshly Lusts with them, and therefore are to be reprov'd as guilty before GOD. The Apostolical Rule is, that (w), *They that use the World, should be as not abusing it: for the Fashion of the World passeth away.* And yet, we often see Persons act so unreasonable a Part, as to abuse these short-lived Enjoyments to their own Detriment; so *Riches are kept for the Owners thereof to their Hurt* (x). Thus, particularly, there are two Sorts of Persons that abuse the Creature, namely, such as nourish

(v) Col. iii. 5. (w.) 1. Cor. vii. 31. (x.) Eccl. v. 13.
their

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their Pride, and such as indulge their Intemperance with them.

1. Such as nourish their Pride with their worldly Enjoyments. Thus many often abuse the Creature, to enflame their Minds, and blow up their Vanity, and so *fall into the Condemnation of the Devil* (y). If they possess a little more of this World than some of their Neighbours, they grow haughty, and supercilious, upon it; and, as if they were raised to some lofty Eminence, look down with Contempt upon those they see below them; and very often their Hearts are lifted up in them against GOD Himself, that they can neither stoop to own their Dependance on Him, and His Goodness to them, but think it beneath them to petition for their daily Bread, or render GOD Thanks for what they enjoy; nor to submit themselves to the Government of His Laws, or the Conduct of His Providence. Thus 'tis said (z.) *Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked,—then he forsook the GOD that made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his Salvation.*

But what hast thou, O vain Man, to be proud of? What! but an imperfect fading World! Art thou proud of thy Beauty, thy comely Stature, thy exact Proportion, thy bright Complexion, thy sprightly Air? Why, in how little a while will all thy Lustre and Charms, be consumed away, and the Beauty which thou hast be turned into loathsome Putrefaction, in the rotting Grave? if they fade not long before thou descendest to that dark and cold Abode. Or doest thou pride thyself in thy great Estate, the Number of thy Acres, thy Bags of Gold, and thy splendid Train? Why, thou art but the more loaded with thick Clay, which, at present, sit heavy upon thee, and is a

(y.) 1. Tim. iii. 6. (z.) Deut. xxxii. 15.

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Cumber about thee, and hereafter will enflame thy Reckoning, as it encreased thy Debt ; and beside will anon wing itself away from thee, or thou must leave it all behind thee. Or art thou proud of thy swelling Titles, and high Posts of Honour ? Why, do not these all perish in the using ? Is not the Ground thou standest on the more slippery ? and may not the popular Blast be turned against thee to Morrow ? Or will any of thy Glory descend after thee ? But what art thou really the better for any, or all, of these things ? 'Tis true, there is a civil Respect due to Men, upon the Account of their raised Station, and large Possessions, which it is fitting, for others to give, and for them to receive, though it be not for them to challenge ; but yet, what little Reason has any Man to be proud of them ? when they, all of them, cannot rectify the Disorders of his vitiated Soul, and stamp the bright Characters of moral Goodness upon him ; but rather place his Weaknesses in a stronger Light, expose him more to View, and draw upon him a more general Contempt. So that after all the humble Saint, in his lowest Poverty, when weighed in a just Ballance, will turn the Beam against the wealthiest *Cræsus*, with all his Possessions thrown in for Advantage : For *Pride goeth before Destruction, and an haughty Spirit before a Fall* (a).

2. They abuse the Creature who improve it to indulge their Intemperance. GOD allows us to take the Comfort of the good Things, which, in His Providence, He bestows upon us ; so that we may not only feed ourselves for our necessary Support, and cloath ourselves to defend our Bodies from the Injuries of the Weather, but we may, as our Circumstances will admit, sometimes, please our Palates, by feeding more deliciously, and drink

(a.) *Prov. xvi. 18.*

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to the cheering of our Spirits, and make a gayer Appearance than usual ; therefore the Preacher says, *(b) Go thy Way, eat thy Bread with Joy, and drink thy Wine with a merry Heart, for GOD now accepteth thy Work.* But then GOD does not allow us to make use of the Creature to Luxury, Gluttony, and Drunkenness ; no ; this is a vile Abuse of the good Creatures of GOD, and a vile Abuse of ourselves with them. For a Man to suffer his Appetite to ride Post with him, and be always upon the Switch and Spur, after the finest, and the best, the richest, and the strongest, as if his whole Soul had taken up it's intire Residence in his Palate ; and never to be contented till he has gorged down enough to intoxicate himself ; that is, to be excessive in his Craving, and go beyond the Bounds of Moderation, in the Quality, and Quantity, of his Meats, and Drinks, and Apparrel, in the common Use of them ; this is such an intemperate Use of the Creature as the Soul of the Lord abhors ; and therefore He has pronounced His *Wo upon them that chant to the Sound of the Viol, that drink Wine in Bowls ; that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, that continue untill Night, till Wine inflame them (c).* And our Saviour straitly charges, all that would be His Disciples, to guard against such an intemperate Use of the Creature, saying to them, *(d) Take heed to yourselves, lest, at any Time, your Hearts be over charged with Surfeiting and Drunkenness.* Such an ill Use of the Creature GOD complains of, in His People of old, and therefore threatens to recover all out of their Hand, *(e) She knew not that I gave her Corn, and Wine, and Oyl, and multiplied her Silver, and Gold, which they prepared for Baal ; therefore I will return, and*

(b) Eccl. ix. 7. (c) Am. vi. 5, 6. (d) Luke xxi. 34.

(e) Hof. ii. 8, 9.

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take away my Corn in the Time thereof, and my Wine in the Time thereof &c. Such an intemperate Use of the Creature, is exceeding great Sin, and Folly, as it impairs, and debauches, the Reason, vitiates the Blood, and wounds and distempers the Body, and often blasteth a Man's Name, and lays his Reputation in the Dust, and reduces him to Penury and Want ; and 'tis a vile perverting of what the Bounty of GOD bestows upon Persons, with Design that they may honour the Lord with their Substance, and do Good in their Generation, by Acts of Piety and Charity, and not squander them away upon the nourishing and increasing their Lusts ; and it effectually shuts out of Heaven at last, for, *no Drunkard shall inherit the Kingdom of GOD (f).*

III. The third and last Use of this Doctrine may be for Exhortation, to prevail with us to behave our selves wisely in our Regards to the Creature. Need have we to act a wise and prudent Part, and weigh Things in an even Balance, and think seriously and closely, upon the Nature of sub-lunary Enjoyments, and the Consequence of our doting upon them, before we give a Loose to our Appetites, and suffer our selves to be run away with by them. For we are in exceeding great Danger of being imposed upon, by the external Lustre of Things about us, their easy Access to us, and the forcible Impression they make upon our Senses, and the powerful Attractive of the general Conduct of Mankind concerning them ; and if we suffer our selves to be led away by the gay Cheat, our Disappointment will be to our unspeakable Damage, in the Loss of all that would truly render us happy, as well as of that which we vainly

(f) 1 Cor. iv. 10.

thought

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thought would do so ; and this will be no other than to leave us finally, and for ever miserable. Let us then be perswaded, seasonably, to correct the Mistake, and since we may *see an End of all Perfection*, in the Creature, be so wise as to govern our selves in our Conduct, with Respect to the Things of this World, as those that are fully convinced, that they are not able, by any Excellency in them, to perfect our Nature, nor compleat our Happiness, and, if they were ever so perfect in themselves, cannot continue long with us.

And therefore,

1. Let us be careful not to raise our Expectations too high, and look for more in the Creature than it can yield us. We are very apt to run into this great Mistake, to augment and magnify the Creature, while we view it at a Distance, through false Glasses ; and hence we are ready to flatter our selves with the Expectation of great Things from it, and thence enlarge our Desires after it : but when we bring it near to us, like some coarse Paintings, which are beautiful at their proper Distance, all its Glory vanishes, and we then see it in all it's real Imperfections. When once *Eve* had got a Conceit, that the Tree was good to make one wise, and she should be as Gods, this greatly enflamed her Desire after it ; and there is but a short Step between enflamed Desire and a *Transgression* : He that looks for that in the Creature which it has not, may *enlarge his Desire as Hell, and not be satisfied*, and then no Wonder if *that rise suddenly which shall bite him, and awake that shall vex him*. We must therefore learn to maintain a low Opinion of worldly Enjoyments, and always remember, that it is an imperfect World we converse with ; that we may not fix our Thoughts too much upon it, nor be hurried

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into too great an Eagerness in our Pursuit after it, nor be thrown into Uneasiness at the having of our Views and Designs frustrated by it. This was the Apostle's Advice, (g) *Let them that weep be, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not.*

2. Let us be very moderate in our Regards to the Things of this World. Let it be our Care to bring our Appetites, and Desires, under a good Regulation, that we may not be carried away by the Vehemence of our own Cravings; and let our Labours after the World be directed by the Moderation of our Desires. We are to be diligent and industrious in the Business of our particular Calling, but yet we must not be so immoderately eager, and laborious, as to neglect the Concerns of another World, which, of all Things, are of the greatest Consequence unto us. Therefore, as the *Apostle* directs, (b) *Let your Moderation be known unto all Men:* That is, let it evidently appear unto all Men, that you are not the Men of this World, who have their Portion in this Life, by your being moderate in your Affections, in your Cares, and Labours, after Creature-Enjoyments. For the immoderate Cares of the World very much tend to eat out the Heart of Religion, and, like the abounding of ill Weeds, choak the good Seed that is sown in us.

3. Be not impatient under the Loss of any Thing here below. The GOD from whom we receive our Being, and all that we have, is our Sovereign LORD, and has a Right to take from us whatsoever he has lent us. Our Impatience, and Murmuring, under Losses and Disappoint-

(g) 1 Cor. vii. 30. (b) Phil. iv. 5.

ments,

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nents, or that our Condition is no better, will be an Affront unto the Divine Supremacy, and Government, and argue that the World has got too strong Possession of our Hearts, or we should not so call in Question His Authority, His Wisdom, and Goodness. We should not therefore be as Bullocks unaccustomed unto the Yoke, but learn to behave as weaned Children to all Things here below, that we may be able to support our Minds, under our Bereavements, with a steady Calmness and Composure of Soul, and may take with Contentedness, if not with Joy, the spoiling of our Goods. Thus says the *Apostle*, (i) *Be content with such Things as ye have.* For, why should our Souls be disquieted within us, when we are obliged to part with what we know to be an imperfect Creature? This Thought should teach us to inure ourselves to Patience, that it may have its perfect Work in us, though we should be crossed in our greatest worldly Interests, or be spoiled of our dearest Enjoyments; *Thou O LORD hast done it.*

4. Let us endeavour, as much as we can, to retrieve the Creature from its Imperfection. This would be the noblest Improvement of it, both respecting the Creature, and our selves. And therefore, to hint;

1. Let us endeavour to get the Creature sanctified. When the Curse, which is brought upon the Creature, by our Sin, is removed, then will it be recovered from much of its Imperfection; it will then become a sanctify'd Creature, and truly profitable to us. For, nothing is unclean of itself, *but every Creature of GOD is good,—for it is sanctified by the Word of GOD, and Prayer.* (k) Let this then be our constant Care to get the

(i) *Heb. xiii. 5.* (k) *1 Tim. iv. 4, 5,*

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Creature sanctified by the Word of GOD, that it may become a good Creature to us. Therefore attend the Rules prescribed in the Word of GOD, in all our Desires, and Labours, after it, and in our Use, and Improvement of it ; that the Word of Blessing may accompany it, and we may receive it, in the Promise, as Part of our Covenant-Portion, suited to our outward Support in the House of our Pilgrimage ; and receive CHRIST, the LORD, in and with it ; so shall we have a Propriety in it, and *CHRIST being ours, all will be ours also.* (l)

And get the Creature sanctified by Prayer ; by an earnest imploring the Divine Guidance, and Assistance, in all our just and laudable Designs and Undertakings, and the Blessing of GOD upon all that we enjoy. For, how can any expect that the Providence of GOD should interpose, to lead them in a right Way, to succeed their Enterprizes, and bless what they have, and make it comfortable unto them, if they will not so much as pray for it ? And then, thankfully acknowledge the Goodness of GOD to you, in bestowing so much of the Comforts of this World upon you, when the least is more than you deserve. *So in every Thing, by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, let your Request be made known unto GOD.* (m)

2. Improve the Creature to the best Ends and Purposes. See GOD, in the Creature, shining in His unsearchable Power, and Wisdom, and Goodness, and displaying His Glory in all the Works of his Hands ; and be led by the View and Enjoyment of sensible Objects, to just Contemplations on the Divine Being and Perfections, and suitable Acknowledgments unto the great GOD, the first

(l) 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22. (m) Phil. iv. 6.

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Cause of all Things. So you find the Psalmist saying, (n) O LORD, our LORD, How excellent is thy Name in all the Earth! who hast set thy Glory above the Heavens! When I consider Thy Heavens, the Work of Thy Fingers, the Moon, and the Stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is Man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the Son of Man, that Thou visitest him?

And improve the Creature to an universal Fruitfulness in Good Works; in Works of Piety, serving the LORD with our Substance, by supporting the Honour of His Name, and the Ordinances of his House, and Worship. So we are commanded, and so GOD has graciously promised, (o) Honour the LORD, with thy Substance, and with the first Fruits of thine Increase; so shall thy Barns be filled with Plenty, and thy Presses shall burst out with new Wine. And to the same Purpose says the Prophet, (p) Bring ye all the Tythes into the Store-House, that there may be Meat in my House, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the Windows of Heaven, and pour you out a Blessing, that there shall not be Room enough to receive it.

Improve the Creature also in Works of Charity, readily distributing a Portion, as we are able, to the Relief of the Poor and Needy, doing Good unto all Men, especially unto the Household of Faith. (q) Give Alms of such Things as ye have, and behold all Things are clean unto you. (r) And our Saviour hath assured us, (s) Whosoever shall give to drink, unto one of these little Ones, a Cup of cold Water only, in the Name of a Disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his Reward.

(n) Ps. viii. 1, 3, 4. (o) Prov. iii. 9, 10. (p) Mal. iii. 10.
(q) Gal. vi. 10. (r) Luke xi. 41. (s) Matth. x. 42.

Thus

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Thus let us make to our selves Friends with the Mammon of Unrighteousness, that when the imperfect Creature shall fail us, They may receive us into everlasting Habitations. This will be the Way for us to retrieve the Creature from very much of its Imperfection, and make it relatively serviceable to us, in carrying on the Divine Workmanship in our Souls, in glorifying of GOD upon Earth, and laying up for our selves a good Foundation against the Time to come ; and then, when Time shall be no more with us, and we shall have no further Occasion for the Objects of Sense, we shall go to partake of the ineffable Delights above, in the Possession of which our Nature will be perfected, and our Happiness for ever compleat.



SERMON



The Excellency of the
Divine Commandment.

S E R M O N IV.

P S A L M CXIX. 96.

I have seen an End of all Perfection ; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

I Have named two Doctrines, as plainly contained in these Words, viz.

I. That the Perfection of the Creature is limited and finite.

II. That the Commandment of GOD is exceeding broad.

I have already discoursed to you upon the First of these, and shewed you, that the Perfection of the Creature is limited in its Nature and Measure, whether we consider it abstractedly, for so there is no mere Creature that is possessed of all Excellencies, nor, any of them, of any One Excellency in the highest Degree ; or whether we consider the Creature in its Relation, especially unto ourselves, for so it is neither perfective of our Nature,
nor

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nor our Happiness ; and besides there will be an End of all worldly Perfection, either the Objects of Sense, we so much delight in, will be taken from us, or we from them : Which shews the sad Effect of our Apostacy, and the Folly of being chiefly concerned about, or trusting in, the Creature, of looking for Happiness in it, and making a wrong Improvement of it ; and should prevail with us all to be very careful to behave our selves wisely in our Conduct respecting the Things of this World, that we don't look for too much from them, nor be immoderate in our Desires and Labours after them, nor impatient under the Loss of them, but endeavour to retrieve the Creature from its Imperfection, by getting it sanctified to us, and by improving of it to the best Ends and Purposes, in Works of Piety and Charity.

I proceed now to the Second Doctrine,
namely,

Doc. II. That the Commandment of GOD is exceeding broad.

By the Commandment of GOD here, I understand, the whole Will of GOD, made known to us, relating to His rational Agents, especially respecting Mankind, as including in it our whole Duty, both as to Knowledge and Practice ; or what ought to be our Apprehensions and Conceptions of the Divine Being ; and what the Homage, and Obedience, are, which we owe unto Him ; and what should be our Government of our selves, and Behaviour to our Fellow-Creatures ; and what GOD will do for us, in Case of Fidelity in our Allegiance to Him : All of which is comprehended in the Divine Commandment.

And

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And it is to be remembred, that the *Psalmist* is here making a Comparison between the Commandment of GOD, and the Creature, and the exceeding Breadth of the divine Commandment is opposed to the Finiteness of the Creature, or the limited Perfection of all the Things of this World ; and he plainly declares, that the Commandment of GOD contains an Excellency and Perfection in it, vastly superior unto all that is to be found upon the Creature ; it transcends all other Things, which Men are apt to be fond of, and is of much greater Consequence to them, being able to make them holy and happy, in Time, and throughout Eternity, and therefore ought more to be regarded by us than all this World.

What therefore I have to do under this Doctrine, is to set before you something of the superior Excellency of the Divine Commandment ; and this will sufficiently appear, if we consider the Commandment in its Rise and Original, the Subject-Matter of it, the Extent of it objectively, the great End and Design of it, and it's Duration. I shall offer something to each of these in their Order.

I. The Commandment of GOD will appear exceeding broad, and very excellent, if we consider it in it's Rise and Original. It is the Commandment of GOD : *Thy Commandment*, says the *Psalmist*. And agreeably, all over the sacred Pages, it is called the Word, Law, Statutes, Precepts and Commandment of GOD. Though Men have been the Instruments of the Promulgation of it, in Part, and of transmitting of it, in Writing, to succeeding Generations, yet it takes it's Original, not from Man, or any meer Creature, but from GOD only, who by his Spirit taught, influenced and directed the first Publishers, and Pen-Men, of the
holy

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holy Writings : *For the Prophecy came not at old Time, by the Will of Man ; but holy Men of GOD spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (a).*

There are such evident Testimonials of its being the Word of GOD, from the profound Mysteries contained in it, far surpassing the utmost Stretch of humane Understanding ; from the Loftiness and Majesty of it's Sentiments ; from the Holiness and Purity of its Documents ; besides the most convincing Credentials, which those who delivered the divine Commandment to the World, brought with them, in the Miracles which they wrought, plainly declaring that they were sent from GOD ; as leave no Room for any reasonable Hesitancy, or Doubt, about it : and therefore we may receive it as the *Thessalonians* did, (b) *not as the Word of Man, but (as it is in Truth) the Word of GOD.*

For if the divine Commandment, or what we call the Word of GOD, contained in our Bibles, be not a Revelation from GOD, and so truly his Commandment, then there is no Religion in the World that is a Revelation from GOD ; for no other but the Christian Religion, as contained in the holy Scriptures, can at this Day, make any Pretensions to be the Religion which GOD requires of Man : and if there be no Revelation from GOD of his Mind and Will concerning us, and our Duty and Interest, or in what Way we are to serve GOD acceptably, and enjoy him as our Portion and Happiness, then all Mankind must unavoidably perish in their Sin ; because they know no possible Way, by which they may pacify the Divine Anger, and obtain the Divine Favour ; which is such a State of Unhappiness as

(a) 2 Pet. i. 21. (b) 1 Theff. ii. 13.

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no Man, in the Exercise of his Reason, can wish for, but must wish, and hope, that it might be otherwise. And, blessed be GOD, this is not the lamentable and helpless Condition of the World, nor ever was ; but from the very Beginning there was a certain, though more obscure, or rather partial Revelation, directing Man what he must do to escape the Punishment of his Sin, and be happy forever, made more immediately by GOD Himself, at first to *Adam*, and by him handed down to his Posterity by oral Tradition ; 'till it pleased GOD, in after Times, gradually to open the Counsels of His Will more clearly, by *Moses*, and the *Prophets*, and finally compleat the Revelation of His Will, in the fullest Light, by His *only begotten Son*, whom He sent into the World, and by His inspired *Apostles* ; which Revelation has been committed to Writing, and handed down unto us, with all imaginable Strength of Evidence of its being a Revelation from GOD, and with the fullest Assurances of our Bible's containing that Revelation, without any material Error, or Mistake.

If we consider the Divine Commandment, with Respect unto the several Laws, and Rules, of Life, and Manners, which it prescribes unto us, we shall plainly see, That all moral Duties are wrought up to their Height, and most compendiously, and yet plainly, and distinctly, contained in the Sacred Volumn ; and thereby we are more fully, and effectually, taught the Knowledge of the Holy, and what that Love, and Reverence, is, which we owe to the supream Being ; and are instructed in the Government of ourselves, and how to subdue our Appetites, and Passions, to the Dictates of Right Reason ; and after what Manner to treat our Fellow-Creatures, so as never to injure them, in Thought, Word, or Deed, but, on the contrary, to do all the

G

Good

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Good we can to all about us, so as that we may be truly Blessings in our several Relations ; and at the same Time it requireth us to believe nothing that is Contradictory to our Reason, though many Things that our Reason cannot comprehend ; and enforces our Duty with the strongest Encouragements, from the infinite Mercy of GOD, a glorious Mediator having appeared for us, and an almighty Spirit ready to help us ; and the most powerful Motives, fetched from the everlasting Rewards or Punishments of the other World ; and all of this much beyond what has ever been taught in the Schools of the ablest Philosophers ; so that we may well esteem the Holy Bible as containing the best Body of Laws that ever were contrived, for the Honour of GOD, and the good Government of Mankind ; I say, when we closely consider these Things, we cannot but rationally conclude, that these are plain Signatures, and evident Characters, of the Deity, upon that holy Book ; and that because it is every Way so conducive to the Happiness of Mankind, and so highly worthy of a GOD, excelling all that the utmost Will of the greatest of Men have been able to reach, therefore it is truly a Revelation from GOD, and not the Invention of Men.

But then, when we add this further Consideration, That the great Author of our holy Religion has given the most clear positive Testimony to the Truth of His Divine Mission, by the many Miracles which He wrought, in His healing the Sick, raising the Dead, casting out Devils, stilling the Violence of the Wind and Sea, and all by a Word's speaking ; and that His Miracles were wrought in such an open, and publick Manner, and before so many Witnesses, (and owned by His very Enemies,) as renders the Facts certain,
and

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and the Miracles unsuspected ; and further, that His Miracles were numerous, and never confronted, much less controuled, by any superior Power : and moreover, that the *Apostles* of our Lord wrought many Miracles, in Confirmation of their being divinely inspired in the Doctrine which they taught, and that they sealed the Truth of their Testimony to the Facts which they relate, with their own Blood : upon these Considerations, there seemeth to me not so much as the least Room left for any Man, reasonably, to call in Question the Truth of the Divine Commandment, but there is all the Evidence, of it's being a Revelation from GOD, that can possibly be desired, or that the Nature of the Thing will admit of. And as the *Apostles* of our Lord were evidently under the Guidance of the Divine Spirit, in what they committed to Writing, either with their own Hands, or by their *Amanuenses*, so, That their Writings have been handed down to us uncorrupt, and without any material Error, or Mistake, is apparent, from the numerous Copies of their Writings, early translated into the several Languages, where the Gospel prevailed, whereby an Opportunity was given to many Nations to have discovered the Mistakes of Transcribers, if there were any ; from the great Care the Primitive Church took in examining what they admitted to be the authentick Writings of the *Apostles* ; by the many Quotations, of all Sorts of Writers, in all Ages, of the more material Passages, out of the *Apostolick* Books ; by the very Adversaries of Christianity, and undesignedly, giving their Testimony to the Truth of these Records in what they quote from them ; and by the general Collation, and Comparing, of all Sorts of Copies, from the earliest Ages until this Time : so that the Writings of the *Apostles* have been handed down to us,

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through the several Ages since, by the great Care of the Church, pure, and uncorrupt. And now, upon the whole, I may well affirm, That we have all the Reason in the World to rest entirely satisfied in it, as an indisputable Truth, That our holy Bible containeth in it the Divine Commandment, as being a sure and certain Revelation from GOD Himself.

And because it is the Commandment of GOD, therefore it must necessarily be a most perfect Law, and partake of an Excellency adequate unto its Divine Author, and greatly transcend all the Excellency that is to be found upon the Creature. Were it the Commandment of the wisest, and best of Men only, we could reasonably expect no higher Degrees of Excellency in it, than are to be found in them, and therefore it would, doubtless, be, in many Things, defective, and share in the Imperfections of its Author, and not be exceeding broad, or transcendently Excellent; because there is no mere Man so wise, and good, but what, with all his Wisdom, and Probity, is fallible, and liable to many Mistakes. But because it is the Commandment of GOD, therefore we may justly conclude that it partakes of the Divine Excellencies, and is perfect, like GOD Himself.

Though it be true, that all the Creatures, as well as the Commandment, derive their Original from GOD, the Fountain of Being, who *spake and it was done, who commanded and they were created*, yet they are vastly different in their Rise, and as different in their Degrees of Excellency. For the Creatures originate solely from, and are purely dependent upon, the Will of GOD, for *whose Pleasure they are, and were created (c)* ;

(c) Rev. iv. 11.

who,

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who, as the *Apostle* informs us, (d) *worketh all Things according to the Counsel of His own Will* ; though His infinite *Wisdom*, and *Goodness*, as well as His *Power*, accompanied his *Will* in the *Formation* of them : But, upon *Supposition* of a *moral Agent*, capable of *Obedience*, the *Divine Commandment* necessarily results from the *Nature* of *GOD* itself, considered in all His adorable *Perfections*, and not from the *Will* of *GOD* only. *GOD* could have chose whether He would have made a *World* of *Creatures*, or no ; there was nothing, out of Himself, to move Him thereunto ; it was the pure *Act* of His *Will* ; and it was dependent upon his *Will*, of what *Order* and *Kind* of *Beings*, to make them, and what *Capacities*, *Powers* and *Virtues*, to furnish them withal : But, when he had made a *Number* of *rational Agents*, it was not solely dependent upon His *Will*, and *Pleasure*, whether *This*, or *That* should be His *Commandment*, or no ; (I mean now, more especially, the *Moral Precepts* ;) because, it naturally, and necessarily, flows from the essential *Holiness*, *Justice*, *Truth*, *Goodness*, &c. of the *Divine Nature*, that if there be a *Creature* capable of yielding a *rational Homage* and *Service* to the *Supream Being*, the *Divine Commandment* must necessarily be what it is. So that the *Commandment* necessarily partakes of all the *Divine moral Excellencies* and *Perfections*, and in the highest *Degree*, and is no other than the *Divine Mind* manifested to us in His *Word*, or *GOD* Himself subsisting in His *Law*.

As the *Commands* of a *Man*, were he always true to himself, (which *GOD* ever is) would be the fairest *Image* of the *intellectual Part* of the *Man*, and let us see his *Excellencies* and *Defects*,

(d) *Eph. i. 11.*

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much more truly, and clearly, than any of the Operations of his Hands ; so the Commandment of GOD is the highest, unbegotten Image of the Divine Nature, because the essential Veracity of GOD necessitates, that the Commandment give us a true Representation of the Divine Mind, and be like GOD Himself, excellent as He is ; so that the Characters of the Deity are more deeply engraven upon His Law, than upon all the Creatures. Hence it is that the Commandment is said to *be Holy, Just and Good*, (e) as partaking of the Divine Holiness, Justice, Goodness ; (as well as requiring them of us) that is, as partaking of the Divine Nature. Though *the invisible Things of GOD are clearly seen from the Creation of the World, being understood by the Things that are made, even His eternal Power, and Godhead* ; (f) that is, the Works of Creation plainly manifest that there is some First Cause, who gave Being unto all Things, and therefore existed before all Things, and so is eternal, and who is uncontrollable in Power, though this Eternity, and Omnipotence of the Divine Being, clearly appears from the Things that are made, yet, in the Commandment of GOD, we have a clear and full Discovery, not only of the Existence of GOD, but of the Nature, Excellencies and Perfections, of this GOD, so far as our finite Minds can make any Discoveries of that which is Infinite : and by this 'tis that we plainly see that He is an ALL-PERFECT ONE. Thus the Commandment, being the bright Image of the supream Intellect, is it self perfect like Him ; so that here it is that, *as in a Glass, we all with open Face*, or in the fullest Light, *behold the Glory of the Lord*, as the Apostle expresses it. (g)

(e) Rom. vii. 12. (f) Rom. i. 20. (g) 2 Cor. iii. 18.

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I am sensible that there is what we call moral Good and Evil, resulting, as we say, from the Nature of Things, or rather from the Relation, and Dependance, of rational Creatures ; and that there is no Possibility of altering, and changing, the moral Nature of them, but they are so stubborn and inflexible, as that, That which is morally Good, always was, and always will be, Good, and that which is morally Evil, ever was, and will be, Evil : But then I can by no Means suppose, that moral Good, and Evil, are any distinct Things independent on GOD, His Nature, and Will, and, as such, have an Influence upon the Divine Will, in determining this shall, or shall not, be a Law unto rational Creatures ; because this would be to suppose something antecedent to, separate from, and having the Supremacy over, the Divine Being. I conceive, rather, that moral Good, and Evil, are founded in the Purity of divine Nature, and, when considered in the Creature, are no other than the Parity, or Disparity of the Actions of rational Agents, (so and so related) to the divine Nature, or their Agreement or Disagreement, to the Holiness and Purity of GOD ; which Agreement is what the holy GOD ever willethe concerning them. And therefore when we consider moral Good and Evil, for the Direction of our Actions, that we may shun the one, and choose the other, it will not be so proper for us to say, that This is morally Good, and therefore GOD cannot but will it, as that GOD hath willed This, therefore it is morally Good ; because it is much easier for us to look into the plain divine Commandment, and see what agreeth with it, than to look into the unfearchable divine Nature, and compare all Things, that fall under our Consideration, therewith, and see how far they agree, or disagree, with it : so that, to us, GOD's willing,

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of a thing rendereth it morally Good, and His prohibiting of it, morally Evil. The intrinsic moral Goodness, or Evil, of Actions, is from the eternal Law of Nature ; as they express it, who seem to aim at setting up something, distinct from GOD Himself, to give Law to the First Cause. But I would ask, what is this eternal Law of Nature ? What, after all our Search, but the Will of GOD, resulting from His Nature ? or, the Law of the GOD of Nature ? A Law flowing directly, and upon Supposition of moral Agents, necessarily, from the Nature, and Perfections, of the Deity ; and therefore is the fairest Transcript, the clearest Character, and brightest Manifestation of the Divine moral Perfections.

Thus because the Commandment has GOD for it's Author, and originates from Him, in another, and more excellent Manner, than the Creatures do, necessarily flowing from the Perfections of the Divine Nature, and not purely from the Will of GOD, therefore it partakes of His glorious Excellencies ; and whilst the Perfection of the Creature is limited and finite, the divine Commandment is exceeding broad.

II. The Commandment of GOD will appear exceeding broad, and very excellent, if we consider the Nature of it, the Subject-Matter of it, or what this Commandment is. And there are several Things, respecting the Nature, and Subject-Matter of the divine Commandment, which greatly discover to us the transcendent Excellency of it ; as, the Aspect it has upon the Honour of the Lawgiver, and the Welfare of the obedient Subject, the Suitableness of it to the Capacity of Man, and its comprehending the whole of our Duty in it.

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1. It shews the exceeding Breadth of the divine Commandment, that it is most perfectly adjusted both to the Lawgiver, and the obedient Subject, to advance the Honour of the One, and promote the Welfare of the other. Thus it is most perfectly calculated to advance the Honour of GOD, the supream Lawgiver, to raise in our Minds the most august and honourable Thoughts of Him, and lead us to the most reverend, and profound Submission, and Obedience, to Him ; that GOD, in all Things, may be glorified by us. In what sublime Majesty does He appear, when GOD said, *Let there be Light ; and there was Light ?* (b) With what Awe and Reverence does it strike us, when He prefaces His Law, saying, (i) *I am the LORD thy GOD ?* Can we hear Him saying, (k) *Thus saith the LORD that created the Heavens, GOD Himself that formed the Earth, and made it, — I am the LORD, and there is none else ?* or read His Name, *The great, the mighty, and the terrible GOD* (l), and not be filled with admiring, and adoring Thoughts of Him ? This indeed is the great and ultimate End of all the divine Revelations to us, to impress our Minds with the Awe of GOD, and excite us to praise and honour, to obey and serve Him : And, subordinate hereunto, it consults the true Interest of the humane Nature, and aims at our Welfare, considered in publick Societies, and in our private Capacity, both in this World, and for ever in the next : As we shall see afterward more fully under some of the following Heads.

Here humane Laws often fail, and a *Licurgus*, or a *Solon*, have not been able to give such a well

(b) *Gen. i. 3.* (i) *Exod. xx. 2.* (k) *Isa. xlv. 18.*

(l) *Neb. ix. 32.*

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digested Body of Laws, as fully to answer all the Ends of Government ; but, after all their Care, there has been left some wide Chafms, through which, the Sovereign's Honour, on the one Hand, or the Subjects Good, on the other, have been struck at, and deeply wounded. Whereas the Commandment, considered as the Law of GOD, is every Way perfect and compleat, so that it wants not the least Iota to render it an absolutely perfect Body of Laws, most wisely adjusted to those great Ends of Government I have named, and the least Derivation from it, or Addition to it, would marr the Perfection of the whole. Hence 'tis, that, in the Conclusion of the sacred Volumn, we are told, (m) *If any Man shall add unto these things, GOD shall add unto him the Plagues that are written in this Book ; and if any Man shall take away from the Words of the Book of this Prophecy,* (which may well be understood of the whole sacred Revelation, as truly as of that by *John*,) *GOD shall take away his Part out of the Book of Life.* Because this would be a Man's presumptuous calling in Question the Perfections of GOD, and an arrogating unto himself the Honour of being able to give a more perfect Body of Laws.

2. The Excellency of the divine Commandment appears, in it's being exactly suited to the Nature, and Capacity, of those who owe Obedience to it. Thus it treats the intelligent Creature in a Way suitable to his rational Nature, and requires nothing of him but what his own Reason and Understanding, under a due Improvement, readily consents to, and approves of, as just, and equitable ; and what the Relation, which, as such a Creature, he stands in unto, and the Dependance he has upon, GOD, the great Creator, necessarily demands of

(m) *Rev.* xxii. 18, 19.

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him. Hence we find the Almighty making His Appeal to the Reason of Mankind, in all that He requires of them, *(n) Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord ; cease to do Evil, and learn to do well.* And what can be more rational than that we should do no Evil, but learn to do well ? And this is the Sum of what all the divine Commandment requireth of us. Thus also GOD addressed His People of old, to call them off from the Service of Idols, that they might cleave to Him alone, *(o) Remember this, and shew your selves Men :* as if He had said, do but act the Part which becomes you, as rational Agents ; I require no more of you ; *bring it again to Mind,* think closely, *O ye Transgressors :* Is it reasonable you should rebel against your Maker, and your Sovereign ? And so you find the Apostle, *Paul,* stiles the whole of our Duty to GOD but a reasonable Service, *(p) I beseech you, Brethren, by the Mercies of GOD, that ye present your Bodies, a living Sacrifice, holy, and acceptable, which is your reasonable Service.* That is, a Service fitting and becoming you as reasonable Creatures, and what, in the Exercise of your Reason, you cannot refuse ; you must act contrary unto your very Nature, as rational Beings, to deny unto GOD that which is His Due : So admirably is His Commandment adjusted to your very Nature. So excellent is the divine Commandment, in this Regard, that if the whole Body of intelligent Creatures were to sit in Council, upon the framing such Laws as should be best adapted to their Nature and Capacity, they would be able, under the utmost Improvement of the most rectified Understanding, to give us but some faint Sketches, (for it would be no more) of this well contrived, and thorowly di-

(n) Isa. i. 18. (o) Isa. xlv. 8. (p) Rom. xii. 1.

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gested Commandment, which GOD has given us in its Perfection.

Besides, the divine Commandment requires no more than what the reasonable Creature has a Sufficiency of Power to perform. While Man was in his State of Innocency, his Powers were every Way adequate and proportionable to the Service required of him, nor did his sovereign Lord expect more from him than he was able to do ; and he might have maintained his Integrity, under all the Allurements of Sense, and Suggestions of the Devil, if he had not chosen rather to hearken to, and comply with, the Voice of the Tempter. And though it be granted, That, since the original Apostacy, and Lapse of the humane Nature, there is no Man but what has his Powers so very much weakened, as that, of himself, he is not able to perform his Duty to GOD ; (though his reasonable Mind may still, in some Measure, consent to the Law of GOD, that it is good, yet he finds not in the Might of his Hands to perform that which is good ;) and there is no Reason that the Law should be changed, in Compliance with the Weakness of a Creature, who, by his own Default, has brought upon himself an Incapacity to keep it, in its present Form ; nevertheless, the Grace of GOD, according to the grand Intention of rescuing the Creature from his Sin, and Misery, by a glorious Mediator, has provided sufficient Strength for him, to enable him, in some Measure, to will, and to do, the Things that are holy, just, and good. Therefore we are told, (q) *It is GOD which worketh in you, both to will, and to do.* And since there is Provision of supernatural Strength for him, that, by the Grace of GOD, he may be enabled to keep the divine Command-

(q) *Phil. ii. 13.*

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ment, and walk in the Path of Life, if, after all, he will not improve the Advantage he has, it will be intirely his own Fault ; and he can have no just Cause to complain, that there is any Iniquity in GOD, that his Ways are not equal, or that He is an hard Master, who gathers where he has not strawed, and reaps where He has not sowed ; nor will he have Room to mutter, that he would have done his Duty, but was not able ; when GOD Himself offers to assist him by His Holy Spirit. So that still the divine Commandment is adapted to the Capacity of the obedient Subject, whether that Capacity be natural, or adventitious to him ; whether what GOD furnished him with at his first Make, or what He offers to bestow upon him afterwards. And this is a necessary Part of the Excellency of the divine Commandment, to be thus suited to the Nature, and Capacity, of the Subject, so as to be but a reasonable Service, and what he is some Way or other able to perform.

But then,

3. Here lies very much of the exceeding Breadth of the divine Commandment, that it requires the whole of our Duty, and that both to GOD and Man. Were it defective in any Part of our Duty, either to our Creator, or our Fellow-Creatures, as all humane Laws are, in many Instances, it would not be exceeding broad ; but since *He hath shewed thee, O Man, what doth the Lord thy GOD require of thee*, and there is no Part of thy Duty, but what is fully contained in the Commandment, therefore it is a most excellent, and perfect Law. Particularly,

1. What can be more excellent, and perfect, than the divine Commandment is, as it includes the whole of our Duty respecting GOD Himself ? This shews us what we are to believe concerning
GOD,

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GOD, what is the Duty we owe to Him, and how this Duty is to be performed by us.

First; This shew us what we are to believe concerning GOD. The divine Being was very much hid and obscured from the natural Reason of Mankind, under the Power of the Apostacy; and therefore the Heathen World, what ever were their Sentiments of the Existence of a GOD, had little or no Knowledge of the One, True, supream Deity; their Ignorance of whom laid the Foundations of that Disposition, which we ever find in them, to Idolatry; and yet much less Acquaintance had they with the Nature, and Perfections, of the true and living GOD. But the divine Commandment hath revealed to the World, to the *Jewish* Nation first, and then unto the *Gentiles*, so much of the Nature and Perfections of the One-True-GOD as was necessary for them to know. Not that this Revelation hath made such full Discoveries of the divine Nature to us, as are commensurate to what GOD is in Himself, this Knowledge is too high and wonderful for us, neither have we any Powers capable of receiving it; for thus GOD *dwelleth in Light which no Man can approach unto, whom no Man hath seen, or can see* (r). They are only the *Back Parts* of Himself, which GOD hath manifested to us, which yet afford us such a true Representation, and Resemblance, of his Nature and Glory, as is more equal to our Capacity, and sufficient to influence us to pay our Homage and Adoration to Him. And thus, by this most excellent Commandment, GOD hath shewed us something of the Glories, and the Wonders, of His Nature, the Perfections He is everlastingly possessed of, and the mysterious Subistence of the Godhead in Three Divine Persons,

(r) 1 Tim. vi. 16.

or

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or that this One GOD is, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST ; the *Second* of which is *GOD manifest in FLESH*, having assumed the Nature of Man into a personal Union with Himself. Hence it is that we are told, (s) *There are Three that bear Record in Heaven, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*

Some tell us, that this *Verse* is not to be found in a very ancient Copy. Be it so. Certainly it is more reasonable to suppose that it was an Omision in the Transcriber, than to imagine that it was interpolated by Transcribers in all other Copies ; as it is more reasonable to correct a single Copy or two, by the general Run of Copies, than to correct all the Rest by a single One ; especially in an Instance where the Generality of Copies agree in the same Sentiments, fully expressed in other Parts of the Writings ; which is the Case here. For if this Text were not to be found in any of our Bibles, yet there are so many others that assert, that there is but One GOD, and that this GOD is, FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, equally the Object of our religious Worship, equally possessed of the divine incommunicable Perfections, and yet distinct in their Operations, that we may with a very good Warrant assert a TRINITY in UNITY : nor know I of any Disadvantage, that can justly be supposed to arise, from our calling the *Father*, the *Son*, and the *Holy Ghost*, three distinct Persons, when, at the same Time, we so plainly declare against a Plurality of Essences, and assert the Unity of the Godhead : especially seeing we have no Word in our Language that will convey to our Minds the Distinction, that the sacred Scriptures give us, between the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*, so

(s) 1 Job. v. 7.

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well as the Word *Person* does ; though yet we do not conceive of it, when applied to a divine *Person*, in that Latitude in which we understand it when it is used about an *humane* Person.

But to go on ; as the Word of GOD sets before us the one GOD, as *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, so it acquaints us with GOD the SON His condescending to take upon Him our Nature, that He might accomplish the great Work of a Mediator, which He had undertaken for us. Therefore we read, (t) *The Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his Glory, the Glory as of the only begotten of the Father.* Both the Excellencies of the divine Nature, and the Mysteries relating thereto, had forever lain beyond our View, if divine Revelation had not made them known unto us : so that we may say of them, (as CHRIST said to *Peter*, when he made that glorious Confession of him, *Thou art CHRIST, the SON of the living GOD,*) (u) *Flesh and Blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven.* Thus by the divine Commandment, or Word, we are taught, that GOD is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, that He is *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in His Being, Wisdom, Power, Holiness, Justice, Goodness, and Truth. With Respect hereto GOD said to His People of old, (w) *Ye are my Witnesses, saith the Lord,—that ye may know, and believe me, and understand that I am He : Before me there was no GOD formed, neither shall there be after me ; I, even I am the Lord, and beside me there is no Saviour ; I have declared, —and have*

(t) *Joh. i. 14.* (u) *Matth. xvi. 17.* (w) *Isa. xliii. 10, 11, 12.*

shewed,

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shewed,—therefore ye are my Witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am GOD. And thus said John the Divine, (x) These Things are written that ye might believe that JESUS is the CHRIST, the SON of GOD. And I may add, that This leads us into the Faith, that GOD framed the Worlds by His Word, so that Things which are seen were not made of Things which do appear ; and that this GOD upholds, and governs, the World of Creatures, which He has made, and directs, and influences them, in all their Actions ; and that, to Him, we, and all rational Creatures, must be accountable, as to our Judge, and receive our final Rewards from Him.

Secondly ; This shews us what is the Duty we owe to this GOD. The Commandment not only shews us what ought to be our Conceptions of the divine Majesty, but what is the Homage, Service, and Allegiance, which naturally results from the Perfections of the Deity, and His Threefold Relations, as well as from the divine Will. I say Relations, not as respecting us only, but as they are founded in the divine Nature, as the Father relates to the Son, and the Son unto the Father, &c. which necessarily implies a Distinction in those that stand so related, so that the one is not the other, in the Sense in the which they are related, and yet the Relation hinders not the Unity of the divine Essence. Here we learn that this GOD is to be loved by us supremely, and to be feared before all that are called Gods ; that He is to be acknowledged by us, as our GOD, by our daily fervent Supplications, and our hearty and thankful Praises ; that His Law is to be observed by us as the Rule of our Life, and His governing Providence to be entirely and humbly

(x) *John xx. 31.*

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submitted

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submitted unto ; that we are to reverence His Name, and Word, and Ordinances, sanctify His Day, and observe His Institutions ; and that He, and He only, is to be religiously worshiped and adored by us.

This teaches us, that the *First* Person in the adorable Trinity, is to be acknowledged by us as the *Father* of all Things, the Author and Contriver of the whole Method of our Salvation ; and as such our Offerings are to be brought unto His Altar, our Bodies and our Spirits are to be devoted to His Service, and His holy Name is forever to be praised by us : that the *Second* glorious Subsistence in the Deity, united to our Nature, and, in it, working out everlasting Righteousness for us, is firmly to be believed in, as the promised *Messiah*, the *Son of GOD*, sincerely chosen by us as our Surety, and Days-Man, unfeignedly accepted of as our Saviour, heartily beloved by us as our great Reconciler, and humbly adored as the Purchaser of all our Happiness : that the *Third* Person in GOD, even the *Holy Ghost*, is to be glorified by us, by our earnest seeking to Him for His Gifts, and Graces, His Comforts and Joys, by submitting to His Teaching, and Conduct, and by our cherishing all His holy Motions in our Souls, and to be worshiped as making Application of eternal Redemption, and all the blessed Benefits thereof, unto us.

Thirdly ; The exceeding Breadth of the divine Commandment is seen, in the Manner of our Performance of our Duty and Homage unto GOD ; in that it requires, that all our Worship, and Obedience, be performed in the highest, sublimest, and most spiritual Manner, that possibly can be : that we not only offer unto GOD the Calves of our Lips, and serve him with *bodily Exercise*, which alone

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alone *profiteth but little*, but that we offer to him our very Hearts, and Souls, which must be seriously engaged in every religious Duty we attend upon. For CHRIST himself hath told us, (y) *The true Worshipers shall worship the Father, in Spirit, and in Truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him: GOD is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit, and in Truth.*

Besides; the Duty required of us forever exceeds the utmost Exactness of our Performance. Though, through the perfect Obedience of One Man many are made righteous, and our sincere, but imperfect, Services, are acceptable unto GOD, through JESUS CHRIST, yet we are not able to see to the whole of our Duty, much less to perform it; for we *know but in Part*, and therefore can *do but in Part*. We may, in Part, know what is our present Duty, but the more exact we are in our Obedience to the divine Commandment, we shall but the more plainly see, that there is still wanting a more perfect Conformity to it, e'er we can fully answer it: So that it is ever an Heighth, which, when we have gradually ascended as high as we can reach, in our present State of Imperfection, we shall still be vastly below the Top of. Hence it is, that Christians are commanded *to grow in Grace* (z) for there is perpetually Room, and Occasion, for their Growth; and no Man is so Good, but he may, and ought to be Better. Thus after our greatest Progress towards Perfection, in the Duties of the Christian Life, we must never come to a Stand, and think *that we have already attained* all that is required of us, but *forgetting those things which are behind, we must still reach forward, unto those things which are be-*

(y) *Joh. iv. 23, 24.*

(z) *2 Pet. iii. 18.*

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fore, pressing towards the Mark, for the Prize of the high Calling, which is of GOD, in Jesus Christ, our Lord (a).

2. How exceeding broad is the divine Commandment, as it includes the whole of our Duty respecting Man? For it requires all possible Duty from us, both respecting ourselves, and our Fellow-Creatures, in the private, and social Life; without omitting the least Instance, wherein we could conduct ourselves with greater Prudence, and Advantage to our own Comfort, or with greater Decency, and Usefulness, unto humane Society. The sacred Volume is full of Rules, Laws, and Orders, for the Regimen and Government of ourselves, our Appetites, and Passions, and for our regular Behaviour towards one another; and requires of us, that *we deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and live soberly, and righteously, as well as godly, in this present World (b)*: that *we mortify our Members which are upon the Earth, Fornication, Uncleaness, inordinate Affection, evil Concupiscence, and Covetousness (c)*: that *no Man go beyond and defraud his Brother, in any Matter (d)*: that *we put away Lying, and speak the Truth every Man with his Neighbour*; that *we be angry and sin not, nor let the Sun go down upon our Wrath*; that *he that stole steal no more*; that *no corrupt Communication proceed out of our Mouth*; that *all Bitterness, and Wrath, and Anger, and Clamour, and Evil Speaking, be put away from us, with all Malice (e)*: that *we put on, as the Elect of GOD, Bowels of Mercies, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, Longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another*; — that *above all, we put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfection (f)*: that *we recompense no Man*

(a) *Phil. iii. 13, 14.* (b) *Tit. ii. 12.* (c) *Col. iii. 5.* (d) *1 Thess. iii. 6.* (e) *Eph. iv. 25—31.* (f) *Col. iii. 12, 13, 14.*

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Evil for Evil ; but, if it be possible, as much as in us lieth, to live peaceably with all Men (g).

But it would be to transcribe a very great Part of our Bible to enumerate all the Rules of Sobriety, and Meekness, of Justice, and Temperance, Benevolence and Charity, and the Duties of our several Relations, in the Church, in the State, and in the Family, which the divine Commandment lays before us ; I shall therefore omit any further mentioning of them ; and only observe, that,

The Commandment of GOD challenges the Superiority, and Precedence to all other Laws, upon this Account, in that it requires all that is necessary to our own personal Benefit, and the Welfare of the Community. Hence it is stiled *good and perfect (h)*. The Laws of Men have no Tendency to this End, any further than they are founded upon the divine Law : And all the Laws which the ablest Politicians have enacted, can't answer this End a Thousandth Part so well as the Laws of GOD ; as is plainly seen, in that the better Christian any Man is, (*cæteris paribus*) the more worthy Member is he of the Commonwealth.

Thus the Commandment, which shews us the whole of our Duty, that we *do justly, love Mercy, and walk humbly with our GOD*, appears, in its Nature, and Subject-Matter of it, to be exceeding broad.

III. The Commandment of GOD will appear to be exceeding broad, if we consider the Extent of its Object. We see that it is a most excellent Law subjectively considered, or what is the Subject-Matter of it, namely, the whole of our Duty, both to GOD, and Man, and no less excellent

(g) *Rom. xii. 17, 18.* (h) *Rom. xii. 2.*

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will it appear if we view it objectively, as it reaches to every Individual among the Children of Men, and to all of Man. There is no Man but what owes Obedience to it, and no Part of Man but what is under the Obligation thereof.

1. The divine Commandment extends to every individual Person, among the Children of Men. However humane Laws may make a Difference between Man and Man, and be too much like the Spider's Web, which catches the lesser Flies, while the greater easily break through, it is certain the divine Commandment has no Respect unto Persons, but is equally calculated for, and enjoined upon, all Mankind, under like Circumstances, and includes every individual Person under the Bonds of it. Hear the *Conclusion of the whole Matter*, the Sum of all that hath been heard from the sacred Code, *Fear GOD, and keep His Commandments; for this is the whole of Man* (i). 'Tis the whole of every Man, or what every Man, even the whole Race, or Body of Mankind, stand bound unto; the whole of their Duty, and their whole Happiness, is laid up in it. The Monarch, who sits upon his Throne, swaying his Sceptre, and gives forth his Orders, and governs his Subjects by his Nod, is equally obliged to bow down his Head, and submit himself to the Authority of the great GOD, the supream Ruler of the Universe, as the meanest Vassal that attends his Footstool. *Be wise now therefore, O ye Kings, be instructed, ye Judges of the Earth; serve ye the LORD with Fear, rejoice with Trembling* (k). There is no Man so great, but GOD is infinitely greater; and He that is higher than the highest demands Obedience from them, and will call them

(i) *Ecc. xii. 13.* (k) *Pf. ii. 10, 11.*

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to an Account. Men of the politest Learning, and strongest Reasoning, are required, to give this as the greatest Proof of their Wisdom and Knowledge, to reverence, and obey their Maker. Nor are the Ignorant and Unlearned, excused from their Obedience to their high Sovereign ; for even they know enough of the divine Commandment to stop their Mouth, in the Day of Retribution, if they do it not. Some, indeed, have clearer, and fuller, Discoveries made to them, of the divine Will concerning them, than others ; and whilst some grope in the dark, feeling out their Way, by the Use of their natural Powers, others have superadded thereunto the Light of Revelation, which, like the Sun shining in its Strength, renders it clear Day with them ; so that these have the Advantage, doubtless, of knowing more of the divine Will, than those can reach unto by the highest Improvement of their natural Reason : nevertheless, all Men are alike under Obligations to obey the Commandment of GOD, so far as they know it to be his Commandment ; nor will any Man ever be faulted for not yielding Obedience to a Command which he was wholly, and unavoidably, ignorant of ; because it can be no Law to him, not, that will not, but, that cannot, know it, for *(k)* *where there is no Law there is no Transgression.* Those, that have only their natural Reason to direct them, owe Obedience to the divine Commandment, so far as they are able to find out what is the divine Will concerning them ; and those, that enjoy Revelation, are under Obligations to a further Obedience to all that That Revelation requires of them. Hence it is, that where the Revelation of the divine Mind is enjoyed, *GOD hath now commanded all Men every where to repent (l) :*

(k) Rom. iv. 15. *(l)* Act. xvii. 30.

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and that while they have the *Light*, they should believe in the *Light* (m); and that all Men should honour the Son as they honour the Father (n). So that this is the Homage, and grateful Sacrifice, which *Kings of the Earth, and all People, Princes, and all Judges of the Earth, Young Men, and Maidens, Old Men, and Children* (o), owe to their great Creator, and his Law alike extends to them all.

2. The divine Commandment extends to all of Man, to our whole Nature, and to all our Powers, and Capacities. It reaches the Body of Man, and aims at the Government of every Member, and every Power belonging to it; that we do *not yield our Members Instruments of Unrighteousness unto Sin, but yield ourselves unto GOD, and our Members as Instruments of Righteousness unto GOD* (p). It extends to all our secular Interests, Possessions, Employments, and Recreations, and directs us in our Pursuit, Enjoyment, and Improvement, of them. And it reaches to the very Soul, and requires the Obedience of the inner Man of the Heart, and means to direct, and influence, us, in all our spiritual, and eternal Interests. Thus it calls upon us, (q) *glorify GOD, in your Body, and in your Spirit, which are GOD's*.

And here lies very much of the Excellency of the Commandment of GOD, that it is obligatory upon the Conscience, which no humane Laws can be, only as they evidently accord with the divine; and then, not because they are established by the Authority of Man, but, because they derive their Authority from the supream Lord of all. So that whatever Laws may be enacted by the civil Power, which, to our Reason and

(m) *Joh. xii. 36.* (n) *Joh. v. 23.* (o) *Psf. cxlviii. 11, 12.*

(p) *Rom. vi. 13.* (q) *1 Cor. vi. 20.*

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Understanding, improved and regulated, by an humble, modest, diligent Search into the Word of GOD, appear to have such a Disagreement with the divine Law, as renders it sinful, in our Apprehension; for us to comply with them, we may, by no Means, so yield up our Consciences to the Wills of Men, as to submit our selves to them, but must chuse, rather, to obey GOD, than Man, let the Event be what it will. Therefore when the holy *Apostles* were enjoined, by humane Authority, to do what clashed with the divine Command, they boldly make a Stand, in the very Face of the Civil, as well as Ecclesiastical Rulers, and made an Appeal to their own Consciences too, saying, (r) *whether it be right in the Sight of GOD, to hearken unto you, more than unto GOD, Judge ye.* And one would think, that there were no great Difficulty in determining, whether we ought to obey GOD, or Man.

And, because all acceptable religious Worship is appointed by GOD alone, who only knows what is grateful and pleasing to himself, therefore, any Modes, and Forms, of Worship, not directly appointed by him, or not deducible, by plain and natural Consequence, from the general Rules he has prescribed, I say, all such Rites, and Modes, not founded upon the divine Commandment, ought to be rejected by us, whatever be the humane Authority that enjoins them, or the Pretensions to Order, and Decency, in the observing of them. Hence we may observe, that the inspired *Apostle* blames the *Colossians*, for their Fondness for either *Jewish*, or *Pagan* Traditions, after their Conversion to the Christian Faith: (s) *If ye be dead with CHRIST, says he,—Why are ye subject to Ordi-*

(r) *Act.* iv. 19. (s) *Col.* ii. 20, 22.

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nances, — after the Commandment, and Doctrines of Men?

For Man has not, nor can he have, any Power over the Consciences, what ever he may have over the Bodies, of Men : but God's Commandments direct and govern the Consciences of all his rational Creatures. And though from the Dulness of our Understandings, we may not be able, always, to see the Reason of what is commanded us, yet, it is sufficient for us, that we know it to be the Will of GOD concerning us ; here our Reason ought to be superceeded by our Faith ; and the Commandment, from a Consciousness of the divine Supremacy, ought forever to be obeyed by us.

I might add ; that the Command of GOD extends to the perfected Spirits above, and the glorious Angels bow down before it, even that Part of it which relates to us, so far as it is suited to their Nature ; they are *his Angels, that do his Commandment, hearkening to the Voice of his Word* (t). The Excellency of the Commandment shines forth in it's Lustre in it's being so admirably adapted to the Natures of Men, and Angels, that while a poor infirm Worm of the Dust is capable, in some Measure, by divine Assistance, of yielding Obedience unto it, yet, it is so sublime, and lofty, as to exercise the Obedience of the highest Angels in Heaven.

(t) *Pf. ciii. 20.*



S E R M O N V.

P S A L M CXIX. 96.

I have seen an End of all Perfection ; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

THERE have been two Doctrines proposed to be spoken to from these Words, namely,

Doc. I. The Perfection of the Creature is limited, and finite.

Doc. II. The Commandment of GOD is exceeding broad.

The last Opportunity I made some Entrance upon the Second of these Doctrines ; and having observed, that, by the Commandment, I understand, the whole revealed Will of GOD, I proposed to shew the Excellency thereof, beyond any Thing

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Thing that is to be found upon the Creature, by considering,

- I. The Original of it.
- II. The Subject-Matter of it.
- III. The Extent of it objectively.
- IV. The great End and Design of it.
- And
- V. Its Duration.

Under the first of these, viz.

I. The Original of the Commandment, I have considered our Bible, as containing a sure Revelation of the Mind of GOD ; and this Mind of GOD, so made known to us, does not result, purely, from the divine Will and Pleasure, as the Existence of all Creatures does, but from the Perfections of the divine Nature, and therefore in this Regard, partakes of those divine Excellencies far above what is to be found upon any mere Creature. Under the Second Head, viz.

II. The Subject-Matter of the Commandment ; I have considered the Excellency of it, as perfectly adjusted to the Divine Lawgiver, and to the obedient Subject ; as being exactly suited to the Nature and Capacity of those that owe Obedience to it ; and as it requires the whole of our Duty, both to GOD, and Man. Under the Third,

III. The Extent of the Commandment objectively, I have shewed its Excellency in that it reaches to every individual Person without Exception, and to our whole Nature, Body, and Spirit. And I proceed to the Consideration of the Fourth Head proposed, viz.

IV.

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IV. The Commandment of GOD will appear exceeding broad, if we consider the great and glorious End and Design of it ; what GOD intends it for, and what it is improvable unto. The great Excellency and Perfection of all Laws, and Commandments, are to be seen, chiefly, in the End which they aim at, and the direct Tendency, Influence, and Power, which they have for the Attainment of this End. Now, the divine Commandment aims at the highest, and noblest End, that possibly can be, namely, the Glory of GOD, and our best Good, both in this World, and in that which is to come, in Time, and throughout Eternity : this is what GOD designs it for, what it is improvable unto, and what it has a direct Tendency to promote.

I shall not, here, enter into a distinct Consideration of this great and noble End, the Glory of GOD, because I have already spoken something to it, under a former Head, and because this is ever answered, in the Accomplishment of the great Design respecting Man ; the Purity, and Happiness of Mankind, being so closely connected to the Glory of GOD, that in what Way soever the First is brought about, by the same Means, and in the same Method, the divine Glory is also displayed, and made to shine forth in it's greatest Lustre. I shall therefore confine myself unto such Thoughts, as shew us the original Intention, and peculiar Adaptedness, of the divine Commandment, to perfect our Nature, and render us compleatly happy ; wherein it infinitely transcends all the Excellency that is to be found upon the Creatures, which every Way fall short of this End ; as I have already proved. And I shall take a View of the excellent Design of the divine Commandment, under these Three Heads,

I. To

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1. To make us truly Wise.
2. To make us really Good.
3. To make us compleatly Happy.

1. One great End and Design of the divine Commandment is, to make us truly wise. The Commandment has a very great Influence upon the making of us wise for the Things of this World, and therefore may well be looked upon as excellent by us ; because, as we value ourselves upon our Reason, which raises us above the Level of the Brute, so our Wisdom is the highest natural Exercise of our Reason, and is that which gives any Man the Preference to his Neighbours. That the divine Commandment is of this Advantage to us, is apparent, in that it tends to brighten our Understandings, and recover them from those Prejudices, with which our Lusts and Passions very much cloud, and darken the Mind ; by which Means, it renders our Apprehensions, and Conceptions, of Things more clear, and distinct, that we may be enabled to see them in a better Light, and discern them more thorowly : Thus it enobles our rational Powers, and assists them to chuse out a right Way for us. For while the Word of GOD is, *a Lamp unto our Feet, and a Light unto our Path*, we shall not only take the more Heed to our Ways, and walk with Caution and Circumspection, and so be among the *well-advised, with whom is Wisdom*, but we shall have a more full and plain Discernment of the Path of Understanding, and clear Discovery of the Way, in the which we should go ; and thus be assisted to act like rational, and prudent Creatures, who are not led blindfold, by Passions, and Prejudices, but, govern themselves by the Dictates of right Reason. Hence, when *Moses* had set
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the Law of GOD before the Children of Israel, said he, (u) *Keep, therefore, and do them ; for this is your Wisdom, and Understanding, in the Sight of the Nations, which shall hear all these Statutes, and say, surely this great Nation is a wise, and understanding People.* This also made the Psalmist say, (w) *Thou, through thy Commandment, hast made me wiser than mine Enemies ; for they are ever with me : I have more Understanding than all my Teachers ; for thy Testimonies are my Meditation : I understand more than the Ancients ; because I keep thy Precepts.* Thus a due Regard to the Commandment will influence us to walk wisely, and surely, and help us to shun many Inconveniencies, which we should be apt, otherwise, to run ourselves into, through the Prevalency of our too eager Passions, and unbridled sensual Appetites.

But however ; The great End of the divine Commandment is, to make us spiritually wise, which is the truest, and highest, Wisdom, and which, when all is done, will be found to be most serviceable unto us. We are therefore told, (x) *The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wisdom ; a good Understanding have all they that do his Commandment.* For no Man begins to be truly wise, until, by the Fear of GOD prevailing in his Heart, he is influenced unto a conscientious Regard to the divine Commandment, the Path-way whereof is pleasant, and the End Peace. *If thou beest wise, thou shalt be wise for thy self,* said Solomon (y). This is true Wisdom, for a Man to be wise for himself, for his best Interest, and his latter End ; and all Pretensions to Wisdom, short of this, is but acting for a wrong End, and to no good Purpose, the Folly of which will appear, in the

(u) Deut. iv. 6. (w) Ps. cxix. 98, 99, 100. (x) Ps. cxi. 10.

(y) Prov. ix. 12.

Disappointment,

Disappointment, and Confusion, which will be the certain Issue of it. For let a Man be ever so wise, in his Projections, and the Methods which he takes, to promote some little Interest, that has no Relation to him, he will be found, to be but a Fool, in the Conclusion, for his Neglect of himself, and suffering his main Interest to run to Ruin, for want of his seasonable, and prudent, Care about it; or, let him provide, for his present Comfort, with the finest Schemes, and most diligent Application, yet, if he has been wholly negligent of Futurity, and must remain, the latter Part of his Existence, utterly destitute of every thing that would be comfortable to him, he will find, at his End, that he has been a Fool. Now, the Design of the divine Commandment is, to correct this Folly; and it has a very powerful Influence to cure us hereof, by acquainting us, where our true Interest lies, and what are the best Methods to promote it; by making us considerate, and thoughtful, about our own State and Condition, and how it will fare with us in the End of Days; and by exciting of us dilligently to improve the Means, that are necessary to secure what is of the greatest Consequence to us, that it may not only be well with us for the present, but that our latter End may be Peace. The Commandment is therefore said, to be *pure, enlightening the Eyes*, (z). That is, the Eyes of the Mind, which are naturally obscured, and clouded, by the thick Mists, which our Fondness for Lust, and the World, cast before them, so that they have no clear, and distinct, Perception of our ultimate End, and the Way to it. *The Commandment is a Lamp, and the Law is Light, and Reproofs of Instruction are the Way of Life*; said the wise Man (a); because by these we are taught our

(z) *Pf. xix. 7.* (a) *Prov. vi. 23.*

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Duty, and Interest, and are led in the Path of Life.

The divine Commandment affords us the Knowledge of spiritual and divine Things, which are the most excellent in their Nature, and most beneficial unto us. What is there so full, so lofty, so glorious, as the LORD our GOD is? Whose Nature infinitely transcends all the Objects of Sense, in true Excellency, and contains a Beauty, Reality, and Truth, in it, beyond all other Things that are knowable by us; and therefore so much the more enlarges our Minds, and elevates our Conceptions, in the Knowledge of Him: and inasmuch as this GOD is the Fountain of all Good, therefore also the Mind in Closing with him, by our practical Knowledge of Him, enjoys unspeakable Delight and Satisfaction in Him, and becomes secured of His Favour; and thus reaps the highest Benefit, from this most excellent Object, that our Nature is capable of. For by this Means, we have taken all the Care of ourselves that we can do, have established our main Interest upon a sure Foundation, and are provided with all that is necessary for our future Well-being, yea, throughout an endless Eternity: and this is true Wisdom, and Understanding, such Wisdom as is not to be attained unto, by the Force of our own Powers, but by the divine Commandment. *For the natural Man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of GOD, for they are Foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned; how be it, we speak Wisdom, yet not the Wisdom of this World; but we speak the Wisdom of GOD in a Mystery: — but GOD hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit (b).* They are the Things of GOD, his glorious Perfections, his deep Counsels, his

(b) 1 Cor. ii. 6, 7, 10, 14.

I

merciful

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merciful Designs, with all the Wonders of redeeming Love, and Grace, which lie very much out of the Reach of our natural Powers, but the Spirit of GOD hath revealed them unto us ; and it is the Design of the divine Commandment, to acquaint us with those glorious Truths, and give us a just View of the things of our Peace, and so *fill us with the Knowledge of his Will, in all spiritual Wisdom, and Understanding* ; and it has an happy Tendency, and Aptitude, so to impress our Minds with them, as that we may ourselves receive the Benefit of them.

Hence, it presents us with the melancholy Prospect of our own miserable State, and Condition, by Nature ; how enslaved we are unto diverse Lusts, and Passions, captivated by Devils, included under Guilt, and liable unto Punishment, in this World, and the next, great, and endless ; and shews us, what absolute Need there is of a Saviour, to deliver us from all of this Infelicity, and directs us unto JESUS CHRIST, the only *Hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof*.

Hence, it opens unto us the whole Method of Salvation by CHRIST, unfolds the Mysteries of our holy Religion to us, tells us what we must do to be saved, and offers divine Assistance to us, to enable us to walk in that Way which leadeth unto true Life and Happiness.

Hence, it sets before us, the strong and alluring Arguments, and most powerful Motives, fetched from the future, unseen, and eternal World ; it presents us with the View of the Crown of unfading Glory, which awaits the humble and obedient Soul ; and gives us a distant Sight of the Place of Torment, the inexpressible Pain, Horror, and Anguish, which is reserved as the endless Portion

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of the impenitent, and disobedient; and all to move us to act wisely, and walk safely.

Thus *Life, and Immortality, is brought to Light, through the Gospel (c)*; and by this Means we come to know the only true GOD, and JESUS CHRIST, whom he hath sent; and so are made wise unto Salvation (d). This is the great End and Design of the divine Commandment, what GOD intends it for, and what, if it be not our own Fault, we may improve it to. This is the great Design of preaching the Word of GOD unto the World; as the *Apostle* tells us it was the End of his Ministry, and equally is of ours, (e) *to open Men's Eyes, and turn them from Darkness to Light*: and hence, when it was prophesied of CHRIST, (f) *I the Lord have called Thee in Righteousness, and will give Thee for a Covenant of the People, for a Light of the Gentiles*, it is particularly taken Notice of, that one of the great Ends, and blessed Benefits, of that Designation, is *to open the blind Eyes*. And give me me Leave to add upon it, agreeably to what our Saviour remarked, when he read the Lesson, out of *Isaiah* unto his Hearers, Oh! that, by our wise Improvement of it, it may be said of us, (g) *This Day is this Scripture fulfilled* among us. Thus, the Commandment of God appears to be exceeding broad, in this noble and glorious Design of it, to make us truly wise; to furnish us with the Knowledge of the best Things, and direct our Feet in the Path of Understanding, to the securing of our Selves, and our great and lasting Interest; which is such a Wisdom as highly becometh us, as rational Creatures, and compared with which, all the Wisdom of this World is but meer Foolishness.

(c) 2 Tim. i. 10. (d) 2 Tim. iii. 15. (e) Act. xxvi. 18.

(f) Isa. xlii. 6, 7. (g) Luke iv. 21.

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I now proceed, to the Second Thing proposed, namely,

2. The glorious End and Design of the divine Commandment is, to make us really Good. The infinitely wise GOD has given us his Commandment, not only to inform our Judgment, and make us wise to know, but, to regulate our Practice, that our Wisdom may evidence itself, by the proper genuine Fruits of it, in our Hearts, and Lives. For all our Knowledge will be but to our Disadvantage, and render us so much the more unhappy, if we are not careful to govern ourselves, in our Practice, according to it: and therefore the Commandment aims, at the rectifying of our Nature, and curing the Irregularities of our Behaviour, and so, to make us really good Men. When Mankind had universally sunk into Infidelity, and Immorality, and were utterly destitute of the divine Life, then it pleased GOD to make a Revelation of himself, and his Mind and Will unto the World, gradually opening the Mysteries of the Kingdom of GOD, from the calling of *Abraham* out of *Ur* of the *Chaldees*, until, in the Fulness of Time, the Light shone with the greatest Clearness, by the Appearing of the SON of GOD in Flesh, to instruct the World, personally, and by his Apostles that Mankind might be recovered, in the Exercise of their Faith and Vertue, to a God-like Temper and Disposition: which abundantly shews the superiour Excellency of the divine Commandment. Thus, particularly, it aims, at the begetting in us Faith in GOD, and in his Son JESUS CHRIST, the converting of us from the Error of our Ways, and to sanctify, and make us holy.

(1) The Design of the divine Commandment is, to work true Faith in us; that we may live a
Life

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Life of Faith in GOD, and in his Son JESUS CHRIST. Faith in GOD, as the Maker, Ruler, and Judge, of the World, and in his Son, JESUS CHRIST, as the only Redeemer of lost Mankind, and ours in particular, is the very Root and Principle, of all Evangelical Goodness ; without which, we can neither serve GOD, nor find Acceptance with him. The Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews* therefore assures us, (a) *without Faith it is impossible to please GOD ; for he that cometh unto GOD, (so as to find Acceptance with him,) must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* And CHRIST said to his Disciples, and so to all that mean to receive any Benefit by him, (b) *Ye believe in GOD, believe also in ME.* For he that does not believe that there is a GOD, and that JESUS CHRIST is the Son of GOD, and Saviour of the World, cannot possibly live religiously ; because all Religion turns upon the Belief of a GOD, and That Religion only, which is acceptable and pleasing to GOD, is founded in the Belief of JESUS CHRIST his being the promised *Messiah*, the Son of GOD, and Saviour of the World ; this being the only Way in which GOD hath revealed Himself unto the World, and in which he will be worshiped, namely, by his Son, JESUS CHRIST ; which occasioned the *Apostle's* saying (c) *These Things are written, that ye might believe that JESUS is the CHRIST, the Son of GOD.*

Whatever Difficulties any may imagine they find in believing JESUS CHRIST to be the Son of GOD, in such a proper Sense of the Phrase as imports his partaking of the same Nature with the eternal Father, because they cannot compre-

(a) *Heb. xi. 6.* (b) *Job. xiv. 1.* (c) *Joh. xx. 31.*

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hend the Manner of the divine Filiation, it is justly to be feared that the great Bar which lies in their Way is, the Haughtiness, and Pride, of the Hearts of Men, who cannot stoop to resign up their Understandings to the divine Mind, as they must do, to credit a Report which contains Mysteries in it which they are not able to unriddle ; and that therefore it is they refuse to believe what they cannot see through. For, after all, there is no such Absurdity in believing Mysteries, or, believing such Doctrines as contain Mysteries in them, as some Men would persuade us ; because we are even forced to do so, in Nature, and in Arts, whether we will or no. And, truly, I know of no more Difficulty, in believing the Truth of a Proposition, clearly, and distinctly, expressed, (that is, in such plain Terms as I fully understand,) when it is handed to me by divine Revelation, (which Proposition, nevertheless, contains a Doctrine that couches Mysteries in it, which I do not understand) than there is in believing a clear Proposition, concerning any Thing in Nature, handed to me by my Fellow Creature, when yet the Subject of that Proposition, or the Thing spoken of, contains such Mysteries in it, as neither I, nor any Man living, are able to explain. As, for Instance, *all Bodies are endowed with a Power of Gravitation* : or, if you desire a more familiar one, *The Sun gives Light*.

Now, this is what the divine Commandment aims at, to produce this Faith in us, in GOD, and CHRIST, as the vital Principle of all spiritual Life, and the Spring of all our acceptable Obedience. Hence it declares to us the Being, Perfections, Works, Dominion, and Will of GOD : Hence it sets JESUS CHRIST before us, in all his amiable Excellencies, and altogether lovely, in the

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the high Concern he has expressed for our Welfare, and the wonderful Methods he has taken to manifest his prevailing Love to us ; it shews him to us, in all the Charms, and Endearments, of a *GOD incarnate*, wounded for our Transgressions, bruised for our Iniquities, and as having freely laid down his Life for us miserable Sinners. Hence the Commandment so often urges this upon us, as our indispensable Duty, that we believe in JESUS CHRIST, (d) *This is his Commandment, that ye believe on the Name of his Son JESUS CHRIST.* Hence it uses the most powerful Motives, the weightiest Considerations, to accomplish a Work of Faith in us. It gives us the fullest Evidence, the most incontestible Testimony, of the Truth of the whole Gospel of CHRIST, and his own Mission from the Father, as *confirmed unto us by them that heard Him*, (assert his Mission, and deliver his Doctrines) *GOD also bearing them Witness, both with Signs, and Wonders, with diverse Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Ghost* (e). So that there is no Room for us reasonably to doubt the Certainty of his Mission from GOD, or, consequently, to suspect the Truth of the Doctrines, and Precepts, which he has taught. It gives us full Proof of JESUS CHRIST his being the ancient promised *Messiah*, the Son of GOD, the Prince of Peace, in the exact Agreement of all the Characteristicks, spoken of in the old Testament, unto him, and him only ; as, the Time of his appearing in the World, the Circumstances of his Appearance, the Description of his Person, by the particular Events befalling him, the Contempt that should be poured upon him, the Death he should submit to, his Triumphs over the Grave, the Extent, and Glory, of his

(d) 1 *Job.* iii. 23. (e) *Heb.* ii. 3, 4.

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Kingdom ; these, with many other Predictions concerning him, having their exact Accomplishment in JESUS CHRIST, and in him only, are an unquestionable Evidence of his being the true *Messiah*. And if CHRIST be the true *Messiah*, and sent from GOD, we may be sure he has told us the Truth, however sublime, and exceeding our Comprehension, the Doctrines he has taught us may be. Because GOD, who perfectly knows all things, would send none upon his Errand, and under the Character of HIS SON, especially, in so important an Affair, wherein his own Glory, and the Happiness of Mankind, are so nearly concerned, but such an One as would keep exactly to his Instructions, and publish the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. And all of this full, and clear Evidence, which the Word of GOD affords us, of the Messiahship, and Mission, of CHRIST is, to prevail upon us to credit the Report of the Gospel, and submit ourselves unto the Government of it.

In short ; without the Commandment, or revealed Will, of GOD, there can be nothing of this Faith, which is so necessary to the religious and Christian Life ; and consequently, the Life of Man, here, would be little better than that of the Brutes, and his Condition, hereafter, that of Devils : for, as the *Apostle* well argues, (*f*) *how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a Preacher ? — So then Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of GOD*: which clearly evidences it to be the Design of the Commandment, to beget Faith in us, that we may not remain in Infidelity, and Unbelief of GOD, and his Son JESUS CHRIST, and so be destitute of the first moving Principle of all rea

(*f*) *Rom. x. 14, 17.*

Goodness.

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Goodness. Hence also, the same *Apostle* elsewhere observes, (g) *if our Gospel be hid, it is hid unto them that are lost* : because they are destitute of the ordinary, and proper Means, appointed by GOD, by which a true and saving Faith is wrought in them. How far the Faith of the one supream GOD, resulting from the Works of his Hands, with a correspondent Care to please him, according to a Man's natural Light, may avail to Acceptance with him, through the Mediation of his Son, we are not able positively to determine ; but we are led by Revelation to suspend all Hope concerning such, as well as from the general View of the World ; the wise Man assuring us, *where there is no Vision the People perish* *.

(2.) The Design of the Divine Commandment is to convert the Soul. The omnipotent, and wise Creator made all his Creatures Good, and therefore Man, a moral Agent, morally Good ; for it was impossible that his Creator should make him vicious, without being himself either weak, or depraved, both of which are Blasphemies of too high a Degree to be imputed to the infinitely Great, and Holy GOD. But though GOD, at first, made Man morally good, and free from all irregular Appetites, and Passions, yet he made him capable of being invaded by them, and brought into Subjection to them : And accordingly, we see that humane Nature, which once had the beautiful Image of GOD shining full upon it in Knowledge, Righteousness, and Holiness, now greatly stained and polluted ; so that it may be said of all Men, whether Jew, or Gentile, as the *Apostle* speaks, (b) *All have sinned, and come short of the Glory of GOD*. The first Sin, of the first Man, was what we call the Fall, the Fall of the

(g) 2 Cor. iv. 3. * Prov. xxix. 18. (b) Rom. iii. 23.

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humane Nature from its GOD, and Happiness. I know there are some who admit of the Fall of the first Man, according to the Account we have thereof, in the Beginning of our Bibles, but imagine, and I think vainly, that all the Hurt done to the humane Nature thereby is, that the Body hath received some Damage, is weakened, and become liable to Mortality. But I should look upon it as much more agreeable to Reason, as well as Revelation, that the Soul, or Mind, the chief Agent in Sinning, should be the chief Sufferer, in the Effects of it ; and, as one Act of Sin hath turned Angels into Devils, so the Sin of the first Man hath brought an universal Disorder upon the whole humane Nature. By this Fall from GOD, the Man has fallen from his Perfection, and greatly enfeebled, and debased his Nature, and brought a Stain and Blemish upon it, by his Soul's being sunk under the Power of corrupt, and vain Affections, and Lusts ; by which Means, he has lost the Image of his Maker, which was at first put upon him, and has contracted the Likeness of the impure, the false, the malicious, and revengeful Spirit ; and so is become unfit, both, for the Service of the pure and holy GOD, and the Enjoyment of him, until there is a blessed Change wrought in him, *translating of him, out of the Kingdom of Satan, into the Kingdom of GOD's dear Son.*

For, that Heart which is naturally full of Sin, and Enmity against GOD, and wholly bent to transgress his holy Law, must be first altered, changed, renewed, by the Workmanship of the divine Spirit upon it, before it can possibly be in a State of Friendship with GOD, or take Delight in doing his Will ; the Tree must be made Good, that the Fruit may be Good : And therefore

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fore it is we are told, *They that are in the Flesh, cannot please GOD (b) ; and, Except ye be converted, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. (i)*

Now the great End and Design of the divine Commandment is, to accomplish this beautiful, and glorious Change in the Soul of a Sinner, to recover him from the Empire of Sin, and Satan, over him, to free him from the Dominion of his fordid Lusts, and Passions, and vindicate him into the Liberties of the Sons of GOD, that is, to make a new Creature of him, and restore him to that Perfection, and Integrity, which he lost. The *Psalmist* therefore takes Notice of this, as the End of the Commandment, and what stamps a peculiar Excellency upon it ; || *The Law of the LORD is perfect, converting the Soul.*

This convinces the Sinner that he is so, and shews him the vile, and odious, Nature of Sin, and what a mean and despicable Creature it renders him, preposterous in his Views, irrational in his Actions, a Slave to more than brutish Appetites, ever acting below himself, ever hurting and wounding himself, and bringing Reproach, and Shame, upon himself ; of all which, until he has a thorough Sight and Sense, and feels something of the Smart and Pain, in the Uneasiness of his Mind, at his Condition, he is never like to be a true Convert. The first Thing in Conversion is, to bring the Sinner to a suitable Conviction of his present wretched, miserable, Condition, by Reason of Sin. For the *Whole need not a Physician, but they that are sick (k)*. While a Man thinketh himself to be whole, be he ever so sick, he is not apprehensive of his Danger, and

(b) *Rom. viii. 8.* (i) *Matth. xviii. 3.* || *Psal. xix. 7.*

(k) *Matth. ix. 12,*

therefore

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therefore is at no Pains to seek out for Help ; but when once he comes so much to himself, as, to feel himself sick, then a Physician will be welcome to him, and he will be in earnest in seeking Help from him, and in following his Directions, in Hope of a Cure. So the Soul must first feel, perceive, and be thorowly sensible, of its own sick, and dangerous, Condition ; that is, it must be thorowly convinced of its own Sinfulness, and the infinite Evil of Sin, that the *Wrath of GOD cometh upon the Children of Disobedience* ; that is, it must see it self *dead*, and *damned*, in the Eye of the Law, by Reason of Sin, before it will look to CHRIST for Help, or take any Pains to alter its present Temper and Course. And this Conviction 'tis the Design of the divine Commandment to bring the Sinner to.

Therefore you find the holy Apostle *Paul*, from his own Experience, assuring of us, (*k*) That *he was alive without the Law once* ; that is, in his own Apprehension, all was well with him, so stupidly ignorant was he of the Disorders of his own Heart, and insensible of the Irregularity of his Actions, and what all would end in, as that he knew nothing amiss in himself, and feared no Danger : *But* (says he) *when the Commandment came, Sin revived, and I died* : That is, when the exceeding broad Commandment was brought home to him, and appeared in its true Light, and full Extent, then he saw the Life and Power of Sin in him, and what a base and unreasonable Part he had been acting all his Life long, in transgressing that holy and good Commandment ; and he saw what was the Fruit, and Wages, of Sin, that it exposed him to the Wrath and Curse of Almighty GOD ; and this was a full Con-

(*k*) *Rom. vii. 9.*

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viction to him, that he needed a Change both, in the Temper of his Mind, and in his State, otherwise he was a dead Man, dead in Trespases and Sins, and under a Sentence of Condemnation, as the just Punishment of all his Folly.

Besides ; the Commandment means not only, to give us a Sight of our Weakness, and Disorder, but, effectually to recover us from under the Power of them ; to convince us of our Sin, and subdue it in us, to break us off from our Love to, and Delight in, Vanity, and convert us from the Error of our Ways. Therefore it publishes to us what is the positive Will and Pleasure of our high Sovereign, that we may know what our Lord and Master requires of us ; that *GOD hath commanded all Men every where now to repent (l) ; cast away from you all your Transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed, and make you a new Heart, and a new Spirit (m) : And again, Wash ye, make you clean, put away the Evil of your Doings, from before mine Eyes ; cease to do evil, learn to do well. (n)* Thus does the divine Commandment positively enjoin Repentance, and Renovation of Heart, and Life, upon us : And, that it might carry the greater Force with it, and work us into a Compliance with what it demands of us, it presses our Duty upon us with the most moving Considerations, with the Hopes of Pardon, and Mercy, from a gracious GOD, if we sincerely repent, and turn, from our evil Ways ; *(o) Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have Mercy on him, and to our GOD, for he will abundantly pardon :* And it threatens the

(l) *Acts* xvii. 30. (m) *Ezek.* xviii. 31. (n) *Isa.* i. 16, 17.

(o) *Isa.* lv. 7.

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most terrible Punishment, the most amazing Mi-
fery, in Case we refuse to hearken to the Demand,
and chuse to go on in our Sins ; (p) That GOD
will render Indignation, and Wrath, Tribulation,
and Anguish, to every Soul of Man that doth Evil,
of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. And that
the Threatning might not lose its Force, by our
vainly imagining, that a good GOD will not be
so severe upon us, but will be better to us than
his Word, he has let us know what he has already
done unto sinning Angels, though a more noble
Order of Beings than our selves : That *He hath*
reserved them, in everlasting Chains, under Dark-
ness, unto the Judgment of the great Day.
(q)

Yea further ; Through the Assistance of the
divine Spirit, the Commandment becomes effec-
tual for the Conversion of the Sinner. Accord-
ingly, the *Apostle* says, (r) *The Weapons of our*
Warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through GOD,
to the pulling down of strong Holds, casting down
Imaginations, and every high Thing that exalteth it
self against the Knowledge of GOD, and bringing
into Captivity, every Thought, to the Obedience of
Christ. And when GOD gives Men up to re-
probate Minds, that the Word shall have no
Power upon them to convert them, it is *by making*
their Hearts fat, and their Ears heavy, and by shut-
ting their Eyes, lest they see with their Eyes, and
bear with their Ears, and should understand with
their Hearts, and should be converted. (s)

And GOD has been pleased to honour his own
Commandment, by making use of the preaching
of the Word, as the ordinary Means by which
Sinners have been converted ; which made the

(p) *Rom.* ii. 6, 9. (q) *Jude* ver. 6. (r) *2 Cor.* x. 4.

(s) *Isa.* vi. 10.

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Apostle say, (t) I am not ashamed of the Gospel of CHRIST; for it is the Power of GOD unto Salvation, unto every one that believeth. Thus by the Preaching of Peter, and the other Apostles, at Pentecost, (u) about three Thousand were pricked at the Heart, and said, Men, and Brethren, what shall we do? and they gladly received the Word, and were baptised. Thus also, by the preaching of Paul, (w) the Lord opened the Heart of Lydia: that is, she became a real Convert, whose Heart received the Word, and submitted to it. And this is ever the gracious Design of the Word, wherever it comes, to turn Men from Darknes, to Light, and from the Power of Satan, unto GOD, that they may be made really good Men. Wherefore,

(3.) The Design of the divine Commandment is, to sanctify us, and make us holy; to make us Partakers of the divine Nature, and influence us to live the divine Life. *Whereby is given unto us exceeding great and precious Promises, that by these you might be Partakers of the divine Nature (x).* Holiness is the Glory of the divine Nature; (y) *GOD is glorious in Holiness.* Holiness, in us, is our Conformity unto the Image of GOD, in Righteousness, Mercy, and Truth &c, and in our Love to all that is good, and Hatred of all that is evil; and this is to be *perfect, as our Father, which is in Heaven, is perfect.* This is that which the divine Commandment aims at, and what it has a direct Tendency to produce in us. It does not mean to convert us from Sin, and leave us in a State of Indifferency, or to make us only negatively holy, but it's Design is, to make us positively holy, in the Stamp, and

(t) *Rom. i. 16.* (u) *Act. ii. 37, 41.* (w) *Act. xvi. 14.*

(x) *2 Pet. i. 4.* (y) *Exod. xv. 11.*

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Characters of the divine Likeness, renewed upon our Souls, and in our living in the Exercise of those Vertues, and Graces, which are required of us ; that is, That we improve the Grace conferred upon us in our first Conversion, and make Progress in mortifying of our corrupt Part, and living more in Conformity unto the Will of GOD : and it is our own Fault, if we do not improve the Commandment so as to answer the good End which GOD aims at, in giving it unto us.

Hence it enjoyns Holiness upon us, in the general ; (z) *As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy, in all Manner of Conversation ; because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy.* And it directs us to the particular Vertues of which Holiness consists : That (a) *whatsoever Things are true, whatsoever Things are honest, whatsoever Things are just, whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever Things are lovely, whatsoever Things are of good Report ; if there be any Virtue, if there be any Praise, think on these Things.* (b) *Add to your Faith, Vertue ; and to Vertue, Knowledge ; and to Knowledge, Temperance ; and to Temperance, Patience ; and to Patience, Godliness ; and to Godliness, Brotherly-Kindness ; and to Brotherly-Kindness, Charity.*

Hence also, it sets before us, the excellent Example of the most holy Life of the blessed JESUS, his Piety, Devotion, and Reverence, to GOD ; his Temperance, Patience, and Humility, in the Government of himself ; and his Righteousness, Meekness, Benevolence, and Charity, in his Behaviour towards Man ; and all to raise our Ambition, that we may go and do likewise : And it entertains us with the Lives of the *Prophets*, and *Apostles*, and other Men of GOD, who were sub-

(z) 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. (a) Phil. iv. 8. (b) 2 Pet. i. 5, 6, 7.
ject

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ject unto like Passions with our selves, that we may learn to shun their Errors, and imitate their Excellencies, and so be Followers of them, who through Faith and Patience, inherit the Promises.

This is the natural Effect, and genuine Produce, of that Law which is itself holy, and requires Holiness of us ; which has an holy GOD, for its Author, and leads to a holy JESUS. The Commandment shines full, and clear, with this beautiful Aspect upon it, *Even our Sanctification, for this is the Will of GOD concerning us.* (c) It tends to beget in us all the Graces of the Holy Spirit, *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance.* 'Tis the good Seed, which, sown in good Ground, springeth up, in the Fruits of Holiness, unto eternal Life. 'Tis *the incorruptible and immortal Seed* (d), by which we are begotten again, unto GOD, and have the Disposition of our heavenly Father ruling in us, and his Image shining upon us. The Apostle *James* therefore says, (e) *Of his own Will begat he us, by his Word of Truth :* And the Apostle *Paul* glories in his being instrumental, through GOD, by the preaching of the Gospel, for the Sanctification of the *Corinthians*, (e) *Though you have ten Thousand Instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many Fathers ; for, in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the Gospel.* And to add no more, hence our blessed Saviour, in his devout Prayer for his Disciples, informs us, what is the End and Design of the Commandment, in that Petition, (g) *Sanctify them through thy Truth, thy Word is Truth.*

(c) 1 *Thess.* iv. 3. (d) 1 *Pet.* i. 23. (e) *Jam.* i. 18.

(f) 1 *Cor.* iv. 15. (g) *Joh.* xviii. 17.

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This sufficiently shews us, that the noble Design of the divine Commandment is, the making of us good Men ; and that the Goodness which it aims at, and accomplisheth in all the People of GOD, far surpasses all the Excellency and Goodness which the greatest meer Moralist could boast of. Though the Commandment of GOD strictly requires Morality, without which there can be no Likeness to GOD, nor Acceptance with him ; yet this is not all that is expected from us ; but there is something more in being a *Christian*. An Heathen may glory in his Morality ; and, indeed, considering the mighty Disadvantages he labours under, a moral Heathen is a very great Attainment ; but it is justly required of the *Christian*, who enjoys a clearer Light, stronger Motives, and a more powerful Assistance, that he be, and do, *more than others* (b), who are not favoured with the like excellent Means ; that he has more noble Principles to act and govern him, that he walks by a more exact Rule, and that he be possessed of more excellent Virtues, than ever lodged in the Breast of a meer Moralist : In short, that he has the Grace of GOD, a vital Principle of spiritual and divine Life produced in him, by the quickening and enlivening Influences of the divine Word, and Commandment, accompanied with the prevailing Operations of the Holy Spirit of GOD ; and that is a more exalted and refined Vertue, and Goodness, than a *Seneca*, or a *Plato*, were ever Masters of.

Thus, under these two Heads, of making us wise, and good, I have endeavoured to shew you, that the divine Commandment is exceeding broad, and has such an Excellency and Perfection in it, as is not to be found in all the Creatures ; for

(b) *Matth. v. 47.*

thus

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thus it becomes *perfective of our Nature, renewing of us in Knowledge, and Righteousness*, by regulating of our Powers; and curing the Disorders of our Souls, by recovering of us to a God-like Temper, and Behaviour; and rendering of us universally Beneficent; which blessed Privilege, under the first Doctrine, I shew'd you, the Creature was not able to convey to us.





S E R M O N VI.

P S A L M CXIX. 96.

I have seen an End of all Perfection ; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

I AM upon the Second Doctrine contained in these Words, *viz.*

Doc. II. The Commandment of GOD is exceeding broad.

I proposed to evidence the Excellency of the Divine Commandment, by discoursing on,

- I. The Original of it.
- II. The Subject-Matter of it.
- III. The Extent of it objectively.
- IV. The great End and Design of it.

And

V. The Duration of it. All of which will help to shew us the Excellency of the divine Commandment, beyond what is to be seen upon the Creatures.

Under

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Under the Fourth of these Heads, namely,

IV. The great End and Design of these Commandment of GOD, I propos'd to take a View of its Excellency, as the manifest Design thereof, is to make us,

1. Truly Wise :
2. Really Good : And
3. Compleatly Happy.

I have discours'd on the first of these, viz.

1. The Design of the divine Commandment is to make us truly wise ; as it affords us the best Means to be wise for the Things of this World, but much more as it tends to make us wise to Salvation.

I have also shew'd,

2. The great Design of the divine Commandment is to make us really Good. And this is apparent, in that it is admirably calculated, to beget Faith in us, in GOD, his Being, and adorable Perfections, and in JESUS CHRIST as our only Saviour ; as also to convert the Soul, by convincing the Sinner of his Sinfulness, and Misery, and turning him from the Error of his Ways ; and to sanctify and make us holy, and God-like, giving us the most holy Laws, and setting before us the most holy Example ; and by this Means to make us really Good.

I proceed to say,

3. The great End and Design of the divine Commandment is, to make us compleatly Happy. You see I keep in my View the two Rules, I

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formerly laid down, by which to make Trial of the Perfection of any Thing, as it relates to us ; and, when we examine the divine Commandment by them, we find there is an exact Agreement between them, which is a full Proof of the exceeding Breadth, the transcendent Excellency of it. We have seen, under the foregoing Heads, that it is perfective of our Nature, and now if we take a View of the Aspect it has upon our Happiness, we shall see, that the glorious Design of the Commandment, what GOD intends by privileging of us with it, and what it has a direct Tendency to, is, to bring us unto true, compleat, and endless Happiness : It means to afford us all the Happiness, Joy, and Comfort, we are capable of here, and bring us to compleat and endless Happiness hereafter.

1. The exceeding Breadth of the divine Commandment is seen, in that Comfort, and Joy, of Soul, which it aims at, in us, while we are here in the present World. We are very prone to be mistaken in our Notions of Comfort, Joy, and Pleasure, and think that they all are to be found, in the Possession of, what we call, a Fulness, and Sufficiency of earthly Delights, as Silver, and Gold, Houses, and Lands, and Children, and Friends, and the like ; or in the Abundance of the Pleasures of Sense, and that there is no Joy like the noisy Mirth of Fools, reveling over their Cups, and sporting themselves with Vanity, or in the gratifying of some fleshly Appetites : Whereas, if we do but consider Things a little closely, we may easily discern the Truth of what our Saviour tells us, *(i) A Man's Life, (much more the Comfort of it) does not consist in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth.* The fullest Pos-

(i) Luke xii. 15.

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feffions are often the Companions of an uneasy, disturbed Mind, and the greatest noisy Mirth and Jollity is very consistent with inward Perplexity ; for *even in Laughter the Heart is sorrowful, and the End of that Mirth is Heaviness* ; as the wise Man observes (k). But there is a spiritual Solace, and Joy of Soul, which is peculiarly the Entertainment, and Satisfaction, of the Saint : An heavenly Delight it is ! Which even the holy Soul himself experiences, not always, but only when he is under the Influence of the more vigorous and lively Exercise of his Graces, and as it pleases his heavenly Father sovereignly to dispense his special Favours to his Children : And this is a Joy too bright, and pure, for the carnal Heart, in its dark, and polluted State, to have the least Sight, or Taste of. This is a Joy which *a Stranger intermeddleth not with*. Doubtless, the holy and good Man will have his uneasy Sensations, as well as other Men, produced, by the Wounds that may be given to his Body, Name, Family, or Interest, which he is liable unto, in common with others, while he is in a World of Sin, and Sorrow : But yet, if, at the same Time, he has that to comfort him, which is an Over-balance unto all his Pains, and is sufficient to afford him inward Peace and Joy, he may well be said to be an happy Man, notwithstanding all the adverse Circumstances that attend him. And this is the Case of every truly good Man, he not only has enough to keep him from sinking under his present Difficulties, but to cause him to *rejoice in Tribulation*. (l)

Now, this spiritual Delight and Joy is all of it administred unto the Soul, by the divine Commandment, as the great Instrument the holy Spirit

(k) *Prov.* xiv. 13. (l) *2 Cor.* vii. 4.

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makes Use of, to irradiate, and comfort, the renewed Mind. 'Tis this makes us the capable Subjects of this Joy ; this hands the Comfort out into the Soul ; this leads the Soul to the Fountain, to drink of the pure River of Pleasures, and take in of the Fulness of Joys. Hence our blessed Lord, in that heavenly Discourse he made to his Disciples, a little before his Death, says to them, (m) *These Things have I spoken unto you, that my Joy might remain in you, and that your Joy might be full.* And so the beloved Disciple of our Lord tells us, in his first *Epistle*, (n) *That which was from the Beginning, which we have heard— of the Word of Life ;— these Things write we unto you, that your Joy might be full.* Here I shall take Notice of two Things in particular,

I. The Commandment administers Support and Comfort to the holy Soul under all his present Afflictions. We know, that *through much Tribulation we must enter into the Kingdom of GOD,** and that *many are the Afflictions of the Righteous ;†* yet, nevertheless, our heavenly Father, in his tender Compassion to us, hath laid in a sufficient Stock of Comfort for us, in his holy Word, in the many Encouragements, and precious Promises therein set before us, suited to our present Condition, be it what it will.

Not only are we directed thereby, so to govern, and behave ourselves, as that we do not, by our Sloth and Negligence, our Impatience and Peevishness, our Rashness and Inconsiderateness, our Intemperance and Wantonness, our Falseness and Injuriousness, and many other foolish Ways, bring upon ourselves those many Distresses and Perplexi-

(m) *Job.* xv. 11. (n) 1 *Joh.* i. 1, 4. * *Acts* xiv. 22.
† *Psal.* xxxiv. 19.

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ties, which the ungodly World involve themselves in ; but when our heavenly Father sees it meet, in His holy Sovereignty, to lay any kind of Affliction and Sorrow upon us, He also, for our Encouragement and Support, gives us herein His gracious Promise *to be with us* (t), and *never to leave us nor forsake us* (u), *to uphold us from falling* (w), and prevent our Burdens from being too heavy for us, and upon our earnest and fiducial Calling upon Him, to *deliver us out of them*, (x) *if he sees it best* ; and, in the mean while, that we may be enabled, patiently, and chearfully, to bear what He appointeth for us, He assureth us, in His Word, of His Fatherly Love, and Compassion, to us, under all, and that He meaneth all for our real Benefit and Advantage ; that we may be more weaned from a vain and thorny World, by our too fond Regards to which we often hurt and wound ourselves, and may be more at Liberty to mind, and secure, our spiritual and eternal Interest ; to work upon our Corruptions, and purge away the Remainder of our Filth, that we may be more pure and Godlike ; to search and try us, and discover the Reality, and Strength, of our Faith and Vertue, to ourselves, that we may rejoice in the Prospect, and to others, that they may be allured unto real Godliness ; and, finally, to be the Means to promote and encrease, our future Crown of Glory. And who can think seriously of these mighty Advantages from the divine Commandment, or have any Perception of them, without seeing, that here is enough, not only to keep him from sinking into Dispondency, in the Day of Affliction, but, to enable him to count it all Joy when he falls into diverse Temptations ?

(t) *Pf.* xci. 15. (u) *Héb.* xiii. 5. (w) *Isa.* xli. 10.
(x) *Job.* v. 19.

Thus,

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Thus, under all our outward, and worldly Sorrows, we may repair to the divine Commandment, and find a Word peculiarly adapted to our Circumstances, from which, by a due Improvment of it, we may fetch in so much of Light and Joy, as shall raise us above the Impressions, which our Afflictions would, otherwise, make upon us. Thus, when we meet with any heavy Losses, and Bereavements, and we find the perishing Creature wings itself away from us, we have this to support, and comfort us, under all, (o) *There is no Want to them that fear the Lord; the young Lions do lack, and suffer hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall want no good thing:* And that, (p) *there is a good Part, which shall not be taken away.* Thus, under bodily Sickness, Pains, and Infirmities, we are told, for our Comfort, (q) *Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every Son, whom he receiveth: if ye endure chastening, GOD dealeth with you, as with Sons: he chasteneth us for our Profit, to make us Partakers of his Holiness.* And that, (r) *Our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and Eternal Weight of Glory.* Should Poverty invade us, and bring us low in the World? we have this for our *Viaticum*, and Refreshment, (s) *Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven:* And that, (t) *GOD hath chosen the poor of this World, rich in Faith, and Heirs of the Kingdom.* Or, are we reproached, and reviled, and have Contempt, and Ignominy, poured upon us, by the slanderous Tongues of those, whose Mouths are as an open Sepulchre? What a Word of Comfort have we,

(o) *Psal.* xxxiv. 9, 10. (p) *Luke* x. 42. (q) *Heb.* xii. 6, 7, 10. (r) *2 Cor.* iv. 17. (s) *Matth.* v. 3. (t) *Jam.* ii. 5.

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in that of our Saviour? (u) *Blessed are ye, when Men shall revile you, and say all Manner of Evil of you, falsely, for my Sake; rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your Reward in Heaven.* So that if we are careful not to suffer as Evil-Doers, but endure Grief, and suffer wrongfully, for Conscience towards GOD, this is Thank-worthy.

And thus, when we are exercised with any inward, and spiritual Trouble, arising, either, from a deep Sense of our own Guilt, and daily Imperfections, there is enough in the Commandment to revive, and comfort us; as that, (w) *Who is a GOD, like unto our GOD? that pardoneth Iniquity, and passeth by the Transgression of the Remnant of his Heritage; he retaineth not his Anger for ever, because he delighteth in Mercy.* And that, (x) *Like as a Father pitieth his Children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him:* And that, (y) *Where Sin abounded, Grace did much more abound:* Or, for Fear of the Malice, and Temptations of the wicked One, whom we find continually buffetting of us, and casting his fiery Darts at us; this is our Encouragement, (z) *GOD is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the Temptation also make a Way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it;* and that, (a) *for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted;* and that, (b) *My Grace shall be sufficient for you:* Or, from the Withdraw of the divine Favour, and the Hidings of the Light of the divine Countenance from us; yet even in this sore Distress we are not left comfortless, but may still repair to the Name

(u) *Matth. v. 11, 12.* (w) *Mic. vii. 18.* (x) *Pf. ciii. 13.*

(y) *Rom. v. 20.* (z) *1 Cor. x. 13.* (a) *Heb. ii. 18.*

(b) *2 Cor. xii. 9.*

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of the Lord, the strong Tower whereto the Righteous run and are safe ; for he hath said, (c) *Come, my People, enter into thy Chambers, and shut thy Doors about thee ; hide thyself, as it were, for a little Moment, until the Indignation be overpast : And, (d) for a small Moment have I forsaken thee, but with great Mercies will I gather thee ; in a little Wrath, I hid my Face from thee, for a Moment, but with everlasting Kindness will I have Mercy on thee, saith the Lord, thy Redeemer.*

Thus the exceeding broad Commandment affords Relief, and Comfort to us, under all the Difficulties, and Sorrows, whether outward, or inward, which any of the People of GOD, are liable to, in the present World ; and that such Support, so great, so solid, so joyous, as is not to be met withal in any, nor all, of the Creatures : A Sense of which made the *Psalmist* say, (e) *Unless thy Law had been my Delight, I should then have perished in mine Affliction.* And it is with a peculiar Reference unto the Advantages which he reaped from the Commandment, when the whole Creation would not support him, under the fierce Trials which he met withal, that he says, in the Words of my Text, *I have seen an End of all Perfection, but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.*

2. Another thing I would observe is, That the natural Produce, and Effect, of our keeping the Commandment is, a true, inward, spiritual Joy, and Satisfaction of Mind. Surely, there is nothing more delightful, and pleasant, to a rational Creature, than the inward Peace, and Satisfaction, of his own Mind ; that this be calm, and quiet, and have nothing to disturb it. - " This has been " the utmost Aim of Philosophy, and the great

(c) *Isa.* xxvi. 20. (d) *Isa.* liv. 7, 8. (e) *Psa.* cxix. 92.

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“ Search of wise Men has been how to attain it : but after all their Enquiry, it will be found, that there are no Methods, any can fix upon, which will so naturally, and certainly, afford this inward Satisfaction, as a steady, and constant, Observation of the divine Commandment, as a firm Belief of all the Doctrines, and a conscientious Regard to all the Precepts, contained in that sacred Revelation, will. Hence are those Texts, (f) *The Statutes of the Lord are right rejoicing the Heart.* (g) *Great Peace have they that love thy Law, and nothing shall offend them.* (h) *Her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace.* (i) *The Work of Righteousness shall be Peace, and the Effect of Righteousness, Quietness, and Assurance forever.*

For, let but any Man seriously weigh the natural, and mighty Influence it will have upon his Mind, to preserve it calm and steady, composed and easy, chearful and pleased with himself, for him to uphold a constant Reverence to the divine Majesty, and worship him in Spirit and Truth, freely to approach to him with his humble Supplications for all that he stands in Need of, and return him the Praise of all that he receives from him ; and to live in the universal Practice of Righteousness, Truth, and Charity, injuring no Man, but being ready to put up Injuries, and pass by Offences, and extend his Beneficence to all about him ; and to restrain his Appetites, and Passions, by the Rules of Sobriety, Patience, Temperance, and Contentment in his Station, and Condition ; and to have his humble Dependance on the boundless Mercy of GOD, and his firm Reliance upon the infinite Merits and prevailing

(f) *Pf.* xix. 8. (g) *Pf.* cxix. 165. (h) *Prov.* iii. 17.
(i) *Isa.* xxxii. 17.

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Intercession of JESUS CHRIST, our only Mediator, for Acceptance, when he has done all ; all of which the Divine Commandment teaches, and requireth of us ; I say, let any Man thorowly consider, and weigh, these Things, in his own Mind, and he will plainly see, and be forced to own, That no Man can possibly take a wiser Course, to preserve his Mind in perfect Peace, and enjoy that inward Satisfaction, and Self-pleasing Delight, which all the Rules of the wisest Philosophers could never attain to, than to pay a strict, and constant Regard to the Divine Commandment.

This, then, is the Solamen of the gracious Soul ! and it is such a Satisfaction, and Joy, to him, as the greatest Fulness of the Profits, the Pleasures, and the Honours, of this World, cannot yeild him, nor can the various worldly Sorrows, he may meet with, deprive him of it : and this is but the genuine Effect of GOD's Commandment : for, *(k) let but every Man prove his own Work,* (bring it to the Touchstone of the divine Oracles, and see that it agreeth with that sacred Rule,) *and then he shall have Rejoicing in himself alone.* For what can ruffle the Soul, and make it uneasy, while the Man is conscious to himself, that he walks in the Ways of Wisdom, and acts as becometh a rational, and religious, Creature ? This takes off the Offence he would, otherwise, conceive against himself, for doing a Wrong, or base Thing, and makes him pleased with himself, and his own Actions, and gains him the Plaudite of his own Conscience, which is more to a wise Man, and lays a surer Foundation for his inward, secret, but yet very powerful, Joy, and Pleasure, than the Approbation of all the Men in the World,

(k) 2 Cor. i. 2.

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without it. This made the inspired *Apostle* break forth, in that Transport of Joy, (k) *This is our Rejoicing, the Testimony of our Conscience, that in Simplicity, and godly Sincerity, not by fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of GOD, we have had our Conversation in the World.* Certainly, the Goings of such a Man must need be pleasant ; and let the World frown, and things about him be thrown into great Confusion, let Friends treat him unkindly, Enemies insult him, and Nature fail him, yet his Path-Way, when he retires within himself, and takes a Survey of himself, and his Actions, affords him true Peace, and Serenity of Mind. Hence we read, (l) *of all Joy in believing :* and, (m) *of rejoicing with Joy unspeakable, and full of Glory.* For now the holy Soul can say, “ I have an advocate with the Father, JESUS CHRIST the righteous, who is a Propitiator on for my Sins : and if any thing can yield true Joy, and Peace, to the Soul, certainly a Sense of GOD’s being, in CHRIST, reconciled to us, and, for His Sake, overlooking our Infirmities, and fully pardoning all our Iniquities, and delivering of us from the Curse, and entitling of us to the promised Blessing, will.

Hence also we read, *of the Comforts of the Holy Ghost* (n). For when that Holy Spirit brings home the Soul unto GOD, and enableth it to yield a hearty, sincere, and universal, Obedience to the Divine Commandment, He takes up his Residence in that Soul, and sheds abroad his holy and heavenly, Influences in it, by which it is that the Soul is made willing, and obedient ; and wherever He dwells, we may reasonably expect that, there will be true solid Joy and Comfort ;

(k) 2 Cor. i. 12. (l) Rom. xv. 13. (m) 1 Pet. i. 8.

(n) Act. ix. 31.

because

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because it is His proper Office, as the Divine *Paraclete*, to administer Joy, as well as to sanctify ; and therefore is He stiled (o) *the Comforter* ; *who witnesseth with our Spirits, that we are the Children of GOD, and Heirs of Salvation.*

Thus, the natural Produce of the divine Commandment is, the bright Rays of divine Light, and Joy. This is the *Joy of the Lord*, (p) and the *Peace of GOD which passeth all Understanding* (q) ! This Comfort, and Joy, is the Saints peculiar Priviledge, and is the highest Degree of Happiness he is capable of in this World ; and is to him the Earnest, and Foretaste of the Heavenly State. This the Wicked, who live in Disobedience to the Commandment of GOD, and have no Delight in his Word, know nothing of : but *the Wicked are like the troubled Sea, when it cannot rest, whose Waters cast up Mire, and Dirt ; there is no Peace, saith my GOD, unto the Wicked* † : *Wasting, and Destruction, are in their Paths, the Way of Peace they know not ; they have made them crooked Paths, whosoever goeth therein shall not know Peace* *.

The exceeding Breadth of the divine Commandment is seen, in that full, compleat, and endless Happiness, which it lead to, in the World that is to come. That *no Man is truly happy, until he arrives at his End*, has been an old Observation. For, however it may fare with any Man at present, we know not what may befall him hereafter ; He that is now in the most afflicted Condition, may, possibly, anon, have such an happy Turn given to his Circumstances, as that he shall never more know any thing that would

(o) *John* xiv. 26. (p) *Phil.* iv. 4. (q) *Ver.* 7. † *Isai.* lvii. 20, 21. * *Isai.* lix. 7, 8.

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be burdensome to him, but ever dwell at Rest, in the quiet Possession of all that is delightful and pleasant to him : or, however agreeable and satisfactory a Man's present Circumstances may be to him, we can't tell, but, that within a little while, he may undergo such a Change, in his Condition, as to be strip'd of all that was joyous to him, and, instead thereof, to have a continued Succession of Pain, and Anguish, tormenting of him. And no Man, that thinks calmly, will suppose, that a present State of Affluence, and Delight, will render that Person Happy, who must by and by change the Scene, and pass into a final State, and of longer in Duration, of the extreamest Want, and the most exquisite Pain. No ; He is the truly happy Man, who ends happily ; who, whatever be his present Circumstances, shall anon possess all that is agreeable to him, without any Mixture of Uneasiness, or Fear of his ever altering his Condition for the worse.

Now, it is the blessed Design of the divine Commandment, to lead us unto this happy End, to render our final, and last, State in which we shall exist longest, and from which we shall know no Alteration, a State of true Pleasure, and endless Satisfaction, to us. 'Tis this that informs us of a State of supream, and endless, Glory, and Happiness, to be enjoyed in the future World, after a Period is put to the present Life ; without which Information we should have had no just Conceptions about it. (r) *Our Saviour JESUS CHRIST, who hath abolished Death, hath brought Life, and Immortality, to Light, through the Gospel.* (s) *The Hope which is laid up for you in Heaven, whereof ye heard before in the Word of the Truth of the Gospel.*

(r) 2. Tim. i. 10. (s) Col. i. 5.

L

This

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This shew us how, and by what means, this happy State is procured for us, namely, by JESUS CHRIST, who, (t) *forasmuch as the Children are Partakers of Flesh and Blood, Himself also likewise took part of the same, that, thro' Death, he might destroy him that had the Power of Death, that is the Devil*: by whose Blood we have Boldness to enter into the Holiest (u), by a new, and living Way He hath consecrated for us, thro' the Vail, that is to say, His Flesh: who, (w) as our Fore-Runner, is for us entred within the Vail, and (x) will come again, and receive us unto himself, that where He is, there we may be also.

This shews us the Path Way leading unto Life, and acquaints us with those Terms, which GOD hath prescribed, to be complied with by us, in Order to our safe Arrival at this happy State; that (y) *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned*: that, (z) *they that hear His Voice, and follow Him, He will give unto them eternal Life, and they shall never perish*; that, (a) *it is by patient Continuance in the Way of Well-doing that we are to seek for Glory, Honour, and Immortality, and shall obtain Eternal Life*.

'Tis this also that qualifies us for the Enjoyment of the promised Felicity, by portraying the Lineaments, and Characters, of the Divine Image upon our Souls, and making of us like to GOD, and meet for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light; thus 'tis *the Word of Truth, the Gospel of our Salvation* (b); 'tis (c) *the Light of the Glorious Gospel of Christ, that shineth*

(t) Heb. ii. 14. (u) Heb. x. 19, 20. (w) Heb. vi. 20.
(x) Job. xiv. 3. (y.) Mar. xvi. 16. (z) Job. x.
27, 28. (a) Rom. ii. 7. (b) Eph. i. 13. (c) 2
Cor. iv. 4, 6.

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into our Hearts, to give us the Light of the Knowledge of the Glory of GOD in the Face of Jesus Christ ; and (d) we are made Partakers of His Promise in Christ, by the Gospel.

And finally, it is this that assures, and confirms, this Happiness to us, and according to which we shall receive our future Reward ; (e) *This is the Promise He hath promised us, even eternal Life ; (f) If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them : and, (g) GOD shall judge the Secrets of Men, by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel.* The whole Gospel is a clear Demonstration that this is the great End and Design of the Commandment, to bring us to the full Enjoyment of true and compleat Happiness ; and therefore is it said, (h) *to be a Word able to save your Souls.*

Thus, the Commandment appears to be exceeding broad, in that it leads to compleat Happiness, in the World to come ; and its Perfection will be more fully seen, by considering the Suitableness, the Fulness, and the Durableness, of this Happiness to us.

I. The Suitableness of this Happiness, 'Tis a Felicity every way adapted to our Nature, and to our Condition.

'Tis suitable to our Natures, spiritual as we are ; and this renders it an happy State, indeed, because therein is possessed what is most agreeable unto us ; so that there is no Jar between our Nature, and the Objects from whence our Happiness resulteth. It consisteth in spiritual Enjoyments, GOD, and CHRIST, and holy Angels, and the Spirits of just Men made perfect : for we shall then, *come to the City of the living*

(d) *Eph. iii. 6.* (e) *Joh. ii. 25.* (f) *Joh. xiii. 17.*

(g) *Rom. ii. 16.* (h) *Jam. i. 21.*

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GOD, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the Spirits of Just Men made perfect, to the innumerable Company of Angels, to the general Assembly, and Church of the First-born, and to GOD the Judge of all, and to JESUS the Mediator (i). The Pleasure, Satisfaction, and Joy, are all the most spiritual, as are, in some Measure, the lesser Degrees of it, which the Saint experiences here : our Bodies themselves will then be spiritualised, and be no more capable of the carnal Joys which now affect them. The Services, and Employments, of Heaven are spiritual also ; Hallelujahs, and Praise, and the highest Devotion, being the Work of Saints, and Angels, throughout an endless Eternity.

'Tis an Happiness suited to our Condition and Circumstances, and contains in it a perfect Deliverance from all Evil, both of Sin, and of Punishment. For, there entresth into the holy City above, *nothing that defileth, or worketh Abomination, or maketh a Lye* (k). The holy Soul will carry no Remainers of Corruption with him there, to discompose, or pollute, his Mind, and marr the Pleasancy of his Society, and Converse ; nor shall any tempting Devil there invade him, but there is perfect Harmony, and perfect Purity.

There no Sorrow shall disturb us, but (l) GOD shall wipe away all Tears from our Eyes ; and there shall be no more Death, neither Sorrow, nor Crying, neither shall there be any more Pain. We shall then be subject to none of those afflictive Evils, which our Lives here are often imbittered with ; nor shall the *Second Death have any Power over us* (m).

(i) Heb. xii. 22. 24. (k) Rev. xxi. 17. (l) Rev. xxi. 4. (m) Rev. xx. 6.

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This happy State consisteth in the Possession of a suitable Good, what a rational, and immortal, Soul craves after, and is delighted in. Then GOD shall be all in all unto the Soul; and the Possession of him, who is the Perfection of Beauty, will be such an agreeable Happiness, that the Soul can wish for nothing in Heaven besides him. Then the dear Object of our Affection, who hath so loved us as to give himself for us, to wash away our Sins in his own Blood, will forever appear before us, not, as on Earth, with a Crown of Thorns, and his Visage marr'd more than any Man's, but, in all the radiant Lustre of an enthroned Redeemer, surrounded with the glorious Retinue of the heavenly Host, shouting their loud *Hosannas* to the incarnate Son of GOD; and the Sight, and Enjoyment of him, whom here we have not seen, but loved, will be the continual Satisfaction, and Delight, of the holy Soul; whose devout Breathings now are, like that of the *Psalmist*, (n) *Whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is nothing on Earth that I desire besides thee.*

2. This Happiness is most full and sufficient, answerable to our Wants, and our most enlarged Desires. 'Tis not only suitable unto our Nature, but there is enough of it, and to spare. There is such a Fulness, in the Happiness of Heaven, that the Soul cannot possibly need any thing more, to render it possessed of true and unspeakable Felicity, and that far beyond what are it's present most raised Expectations, and earnest Cravings. For, (o) *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither hath it entred into the Heart of Man to conceive, how great things GOD hath laid up for them that love him.*

(n) *Pf. lxxiii. 25.* (o) *1 Cor. ii. 9.*

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Fulness, and Sufficiency, are very necessary Ingredients in true Happiness. For, let a Man's Possessions be what they will, yet, if they are not, equal to his Desires, he is miserable, in the Midst of his greatest Abundance ; because *his Desires, of what he has not, and cannot have, will be a continual Torment to him.* But here, in the Happiness of the future World, there is an immense Fulness ; not Streams only, but *Rivers of Pleasure*, not Abundance only, but *Fulness of Joys, which are at GOD's Right Hand* (p). 'Tis a satisfying Fulness, which compleatly fills every Appetite of the Soul ; and more ; the holy Soul *enters into the Joy of his Lord* (q). He is swallowed up with ineffable Delights and Satisfaction.

In short ; There is enough in GOD, and CHRIST, and Heaven, to satisfy all the Appetites of the innumerable Hosts of Heaven ; and, whilst each particular Believer shall have as much as he can contain, there remains an infinite Ocean of Delights behind, from whence all the glorified Angels derive their unutterable Joys, and yet, there is no more of an Abatement, and lowering, of the Fountain, than if there were none of those Miriads of Streams continually issuing from it, which everlastingly delight those happy Spirits.

3. Lastly ; to render this Happiness truly compleat, it shall never have an End. The Happiness, which the divine Commandment leads us to, not only succeeds to that mixed Condition which attends us while we are in this World, and is our last Stage, after which we shall know no other State, but it will abide, and continue, with us, throughout an endless Duration ; and this renders

(p) *Pf. xvi. 11.* (q) *Matth. xxv. 21.*

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it a State of Happiness indeed. A short Fit of Ease, following upon a much longer one of Pain, is exceeding pleasant; and how greatly would the Pleasure be enhanced, could we be sure the Pain would return no more upon us? What then will the long, the uninterrupted, the endless Delights, and Pleasures, of Eternity be? How Ravishing! how Transporting! must it be, for the Soul to feel itself in the full Possession of perfect Tranquility, encircled with all that is entertaining, and delightful to it, and to be able to look Forward, and be assured, that this State will continue forever and ever? This is the Condition of the happy Spirits in the heavenly World. The Rivers of Pleasures at GOD's Right Hand continue to flow, and will do so forever and ever. Nothing shall be able to dam up the flowing Stream; no Duration will be sufficient to run it dry; but, throughout an endless Eternity, the Happiness will remain, and increase, upon the obedient Soul; and the more he receives, the more capable will the enlarged Mind be of advanced Degrees of it, and be perpetually as filled, as it is extended, without ever being cloyed, or the least Diminution of the Felicity.

The great Author, and Object, of this Happiness is, *from everlasting to everlasting* (r); and this Felicity can no more cease to flow from him, upon Supposition of a Subject capable of receiving it, than He can cease to have a Being.

The joyful Partakers of this Happiness are purified, immortal Spirits (s), and immortal Bodies (t) also, and consequently the Happiness itself must needs be everlasting.

(r) *Pf.* xc. 2. (s) *Matth.* x. 28. (t) 1 *Cor.* xv. 53.

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Hence the Seat of this Blessedness is stiled, *an everlasting Habitation (u), an House, not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens (w)* ; and the blessed State is termed, *eternal Life (x)*.

Thus we see that the Happiness of the future World is perfect and compleat, being suitable, full, and endless ; and that it is the great, and noble End, and Design, of the Divine Commandment, to bring us to all of this Happiness, and fix us in it : hence said our Saviour, *(y) I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, He gave Me a Commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak ; and I know that his Commandment is Life everlasting.*

These Things shew us, that the Divine Commandment is exceeding broad, considered as to its gracious End and Design, which, we see, is to perfect our Nature, and compleat our Happiness ; which none, nor all, of the Creatures are able to Effect. There remaineth one Head more to be spoken to, which I shall more briefly go over, and conclude the doctrinal handling of these Words. viz.

V. The Commandment of GOD will appear exceeding broad, if we consider its Duration, that it forever abideth. Duration addeth greatly to the Worth and Excellency of Things which are otherwise valuable. 'Tis This that renders Gold the most precious of Metals, in the Estimation of Mankind, that it is less Subject to Corruption, and Loss, by Rust, or to Destruction, by the severest Trial the Fire can make upon it, and so is of a more durable Nature, than any other. And this stamps a peculiar Excellency, and Dignity, upon the Commandment, Law, or Word

(u) Luk. xvi. 9. *(w)* 2 Cor. v. 1. *(x)* Rom. vi. 22.

(y) Job. xii. 49, 50.

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of GOD, that, when all the Objects of Sense are fading, and perishing, in their Nature, yet That remaineth fixed, permanent, and abiding, and continueth stedfast forever : for, who shall change what the infinitely great and wise GOD has determined ; or, alter the Thing that hath gone out of His Mouth ? (2) *All Flesh is Grass, and the Goodliness thereof as the Flower of Grass ;---the Grass withereth, the Flower fadeth, but the Word of our GOD shall stand forever.* Particularly,

1. It may not be improper to observe, the permanent Duration of that excellent Book, which containeth the Commandment of GOD, and handeth to us the Revelation of the Divine Mind and Will unto the World. However the first Ages of the World, under the Advantage of the Longevity of the Patriarchs, might have the Knowledge of what GOD had revealed, handed down from Father to Son, in a traditionary Way, sufficiently certain, to guide them in their Conduct ; Yet as those Revelations multiplied, and the Life of Man was shortened, the divine Wisdom saw it necessary, to direct to a Collection of these Revelations, (as far as there was Occasion,) and committing them to Writing, by Men under the Inspiration and Guidance of the divine Spirit ; that there might be a more certain Conveyance of the various Truths, and Duties, necessary to be believed, and practised, to succeeding Generations, than the Brevity of Life, Defects of Memory, and sinister Designs of multiplied Nations of Men, would admit of ; and accordingly, all that GOD has seen meet to reveal, and thought proper to preserve, through the Series of the Old-Testament, and the New, until the sacred

(2) *Isa.* xl. 6, 8.

Canon,

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Canon, the Rule of our Faith, and Manners, was compleated, and there was no Occasion for any New Revelation, has been, at different Times, collected, and put into Writing, and is contained in that Book we call THE BIBLE, the Book of Books.

Now, it is a Matter well worthy of our Observation, for us to consider, after what a wonderful Manner, this holy Book, containing the Commandment, Law, and Word, of our GOD, has been preserved, and handed down to us, through so many Generations ; notwithstanding all the Malice and Spite, the Rage and Fury, of the World against it. When *Moses* beheld a Bush burning with Fire, and yet not consumed, it filled him with Wonder ; and he said upon it, (a) *I will now turn aside, and see this great Sight, why the Bush is not burnt.* That the Word of GOD has continued to this Day, after having endured so many Ages fiery Trial ; and all the Flames, which the Lusts of Men, and Rage of Devils, have kindled against it, have not been able to consume it, is little less wonderful and surprising. For it is very certain, that there is no Book in the World so directly contrary to the Kingdom, and Interest, of the Devil, as our *Bible* is ; no Book so diametrically opposite to the carnal Views, and sensual Pleasures, of Mankind, that gives such a Check to their most violent Inclinations, that so pungently touches them in the most tender Point, by thwarting and disturbing, of them, in their most pleasing Gratifications, as this Book does, by the strict Holiness, and Purity of its Doctrines, and Laws ; and therefore it would be no strange Thing, but what might be expected, that Earth and Hell

(a) *Exod.* iii. 3.

should

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should combine together, in their utmost Endeavours, to destroy this holy Book from off the Face of the Earth, that there may be no more a Remembrance of it among Men. And accordingly, the Enemy have made their fierce Assaults upon the *Bible*; there have been publick Orders, and vigorous Attempts, from the ruling Powers of the Earth, to call in, and burn, and destroy, all the Copies of this Book of GOD; and yet it has outlived all the Spite, and Fury, of its persecuting Adversaries; and has been translated into most Languages, and spread over many and mighty Nations. While innumerable Writings, of merely humane Composition, though greatly valued by the World, have been eaten out, and totally devoured by the Iron Teeth of Time, these sacred Writings, though the first born of Writings, have remained firm, and secure, through all Ages, to this Day; and no Attempts of Hereticks to corrupt them, have been able to prevail against them, but the Imposture has soon been discovered, and the canonical Books preserved pure, and uncorrupt, in every material Article, to our Times: though probably there may be some literal, and less material Errors, through the Mistakes of Transcribers, and Typographers, easily discerned and corrected. So the Word of GOD abideth forever, and shall do so as long as the World lasteth. And it is no weak Argument of the divine Original of our *Holy Bible*, that such a peculiar Care of divine Providence has been so evidently manifested in the Preservation of it, as has baffled all Endeavours to suppress, and destroy it.

If we take a View of the several Matters contained in our *holy Bible*, we shall see that they are permanent and durable, I do not mean now
the

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the historical Part of the Bible, (tho' even that, being once true, remaineth forever so,) but I intend those Parts of the Bible which refer to our Duty, and our Happiness : and, leaving the moral Part to be considered by itself, I shall here only touch upon some other Heads.

Thus, if we consider the several Revelations contained in the sacred Oracles, we shall find, that, however they may, many of them, comprise such deep and mysterious Doctrines in them, as the greatest Search of the humane Understanding is not able to comprehend, yet, they are such sure and certain Truths, as will remain forever immutably the same : so that we may say upon them all, *(b) Thy Word is true from the Beginning, and every one of thy righteous Judgments endureth forever.*

Or, if we consider the Predictions of the holy Writings, they will all of them appear to be infallibly certain, and, as many of them have been already exactly fulfilled, so, they all shall, in their due Time, without failing in the least Point, receive their full Accomplishment ; and, when they are finally accomplished, it will remain an eternal Truth, that they were Predictions of such, and such, future Events, and that the Event exactly corresponded with the Production. Therefore the Prophet *Isaiab* introduces GOD Himself saying *(c) I am GOD, and there is none else ; I am GOD, and there is none like Me , declaring the End from the Beginning, and, from ancient Times, the Things that are not yet done ; saying my Counsel shall stand, and I will do all my Pleasure.*

Or, if we consider the Promises contained in the Word of GOD, we shall find, that they

(b) Psal. cxix. 160.

(c) Isai. xli. 9, 10.

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are not *Yea*, and *Nay*, uncertain, and indeterminate, loose, and changable, but they are all of them *Yea*, and *Amen*, sure, and infallible, firmer than Mountains of Brass, and shall all of them, without Exception, in due Time, and in the proper Manner, be fulfilled unto them who are intituled unto them ; being founded upon the immutable Nature of GOD, which admitteth of no Variation, or Shadow of turning ; and when they are once fulfilled are made good forever. Hence the Psalmist said, (d) *Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in Heaven ; Thy Word of Promise is ratified and confirmed in Heaven ; Thy Faithfulness is unto all Generations.*

So the Religion, taught us in the Word of GOD, abideth forever. Whatever have been the Alterations in the external Modes, Rites, and Ceremonies, of the true Religion, which came down from Heaven, yet, as to the Substance thereof, it has been, and ever will be, invariably the same ; therefore it is called, (e) *the Way everlasting*, and (f) *an everlasting Covenant*. For there never was, nor ever will be, any, from amongst the sinful Children of Men, received into the Favour of GOD, but through a Mediator, making himself an Offering, and Sacrifice for Sin ; and by a sincere turning from all Wickedness, and patient Continuance in the Way of Well-doing. The Terms of Blessedness are forever the same.

I may add, the Blessed Effect of the Word of GOD, upon the hearts of Men, is permanent and abiding. That divine Work wrought upon the Soul of a Sinner, whereby he is be-

(d) *Psal.* cxix. 89. (e) *Psal.* cxxxix. 14. (f) *1 Chron.* xvi. 17.

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gotten with the Word of Truth, and has the divine Image, and Likeness, renewed upon him, in a real thorow Conversion to GOD, shall never perish and come to nothing, but be perfected unto the Day of CHRIST ; He that hath begun the good Work, will take care of the Compleating of it ; and the divine Life, introduced into the Soul, here, by the *Vehiculum Spiritus*, the Chariot of Salvation, shall pass over into eternal Glory. However frail the Believer may be in himself, and subject to many Weaknesses, and Falls, yet, the divine Power which has taken Possession of him, will not be forced to let go it's Hold, but, will uphold, and preserve him ; and none shall be able to pluck him out of the Redeemer's Hands. The Seeds of divine Grace, planted in the renewed Soul, are incorruptible, immortal, and shall never die, but flourish forever and ever. Hence we read (g) of, *being born again, not of corruptible Seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of GOD, which liveth and abideth forever.*

3. The preceptive Part of the divine Commandment is of Everlasting Duration. I mean the moral Part of GOD's Law. For, though positive Precepts, depending upon the Will of the Law-giver, and the variable Circumstances of the Subject, are alterable, at Pleasure, and as those Circumstances are changed, yet, the moral Precepts, which flow from the immutable Nature of GOD, and the constant Nature, and Relation, of Man, remain forever invariable. So the Divine Commandment was a Commandment unto *Adam*, a Law unto *Israel*, and is so to us *Gentiles*, since, through the tender Mercy of the most High, *the Light of Israel is risen upon us.* So that the

(g) 1 Pet. 1. 23.

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divine Commandment endureth throughout all Ages, as well as extendeth to all Persons. Hence the *Psalmist* said, *(b) concerning thy Testimonies, I have known of old, that thou hast founded them forever* : they are designed to endure forever, and are infinitely more unchangable than the Laws of the *Medes* and *Persians*.

Yea, the Divine Commandment is eternal Verity, founded upon the infinite Perfections of the Divine Nature, to which nothing can be added, from which nothing can be wanting, and therefore, like the divine Nature itself, shall endure throughout all Generations, and to an endless Eternity. Hence said our Saviour, *(i) Till Heaven and Earth pass away, one jot, or one Tittle, shall in no wise pass from the Law.* "The moral Law is unchangable, immutable; sooner "shall Heaven and Earth be abolished, than the "Authority, and Obligation, of the moral Law "be dissolved †. For though the Believer, when he shall arrive at his happy Seat, may no longer be a Subject capable of yielding Obedience to this, or that, Part of the Commandment ; (which was adapted unto him, while he was on Earth,) yet, this argueth no Alteration in the Commandment itself, much less a nullifying of it ; the Commandment abideth still, and forever, the same ; because the natural, and necessary, Result of those Perfections which eternally centre in GOD ; so that if there were, through an whole Eternity, a capable Subject, every Part of the Commandment, including Moral Duty, would forever remain in Force ; but it only argueth a Change in the Subject, and that, because of his, then, advanced State, and Condition, this, or that, Part of the

(b) Ps. cxix. 152. (i) Matth. v. 18. † Mr. Burkit.

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Commandment would have no Relation to him.

To give an Instance, in that Repentance, and Sorrow of Soul for Sin, which, here, is the great Duty of every Christian : These are the natural Result of the Perfections of GOD, considered in Relation to a sinful Creature, as yet a capable Subject of Mercy ; and therefore they forever remain good, in themselves, though, in Heaven, there is no Sinner to yield Obedience to them, nor, in Hell, any that are the capable Subjects of Mercy. Though there may be an Alteration in the Capacity, and Relation, of the Subject, by which Means he is no longer held under Obligation to perform such, or such a Duty ; that is, is not under Obligations to obey a Law which was not made for him ; yet there can be no Alteration, strictly speaking, in the Nature of the Divine Commandment ; which is unchangeable, as GOD himself is. So that there is an eternal Excellency in the Divine Commandment.

Thus, I have shewed you, the Commandment of GOD is exceeding broad, considered in the Excellency of its Original ; it's Nature ; and the Extent of it, to every Man, and to our whole Duty ; in it's great End and Design, to perfect our Nature, and make us compleatly happy ; and in it's eternal Duration ; And, upon the Whole, we see, with what good Reason the *Psalmist* said, *I have seen an End of all Perfection, but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.*

I must now leave the Improvement of these things to a farther Opportunity, GOD willing ; Consider what you have now heard, (or read,) and the LORD give you Understanding in all Things.

SERMON.



S E R M O N VII.

P S A L M CXIX. 96.

I have seen an End of all Perfection ; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

THE last Opportunity I had of discoursing to you from these Words, I finished what I had to say upon the Second Doctrine ; viz. That the *Commandment of GOD is exceeding broad* : under which I have shewed the exceeding Breadth, or very great Excellency, of the Divine Commandment, in its Original, the Subject-Matter of it, it's Extent, the noble End and Design of it, and in its Duration : and I shall now proceed to make some suitable Improvement of what has been said.

Use I. And the first Use of this Doctrine may by Way of Information, to instruct and teach us, and that in several things. As,

1. This Doctrine may serve to teach us, the wonderful Goodness, Mercy, and Compassion, of GOD to a miserable World. The exceeding Breadth of the Divine Commandment,
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we have seen, lies very much in the gracious Ends and Designs of it, which are to correct the Disorders of our Nature, and to make happy Creatures of us ; and since these are the excellent Designs of the Divine Commandment, what GOD aims at by it ; and what it is admirably adapted unto, we have from hence a clear Conviction of the abundant Mercy, Goodness, and Compassion, of GOD, to fallen miserable Sinners, in so highly favouring of us, as to make such a Revelation of his Mind and Will to us, as may happily recover us from our lapsed Condition, the Sinfulness, and the Misery of it. GOD might, if He had so pleased, have left us in the Condition of fallen Angels, to whom He has made no such new Discoveries of his Mind and Will, as affords any Direction, and Encouragement, unto them, to return to their Duty to Him, with the Assurance, of their being forgiven their past Offences, and received into his special Favour, in Case they do so : whereas he has been pleased to deal quite otherwise with us, and has given us His Word, his Commandment, the Revelation of his Will concerning us, that hereby we might be directed in the whole of our Duty, both as to Faith, and Manners, and that we might have all imaginable Encouragement, to return to him, and carefully attend our Duty, from the fullest Assurances, that, through the Mediation of his dear Son, He is most ready to admit us into his Friendship, and bestow upon us all the Happiness we are capable of receiving. What Obligations could the divine Majesty be under to Creatures that had lost their Rectitude, and forfeited his Favour, by the Act of their own Will, to en-
tertain

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certain one kind Thought of recovering them from that Death, and Hell, which was their just Due, and to give Light and Instruction to them, to guide their Feet into the Way of Peace ? And what is there to move the infinitely great GOD, who needs us not, neither can be benefited by us, thus to distinguish us with his kind Regards to us ? What, but the pure Goodness of his Nature, his free and rich Mercy, and Compassion ? 'Tis because *he delighteth in Mercy (a)*, that he hath given us his Commandment, without which our Condition had been unavoidably miserable, nor could we have known any possible Way of helping ourselves.

It is true, if we had been left wholly to the Light of Nature, without a divine Revelation, we might have spelled out so much of our Duty to GOD, and our Neighbours, as would have rendred us altogether inexcusable in the Neglect of it : for *the Work of the Law is written in the Hearts of them, who have not the written Law, so that they are a Law unto themselves*, as the Apostle discourses (b) ; and so much of *the invisible things of GOD is clearly seen, being understood by the Things that are made*, (c) as would have forever condemned us, if we *should not have glorified him as GOD* : yet this natural Light, alone, would never have been able to have answered the great Designs, of perfecting our Nature, and compleating our Happiness ; yea, I doubt not to say, it would have left us far short of moral Rectitude, and altogether in the dark about the Way of Salvation. For, this inbred Law is so dimmed,

(a) *Mic.* vii. 18. (b) *Rom.* ii. 14, 15. (c) *ch.* i. 20.

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and obscured, by the Corruption, and Depravity, which, we certainly find by sad Experience, attends our Nature, (howsoever we first came by it,) that we should not have been able, by the Light of it, to have read the whole of our Duty, nor to have seen where our true Interest lay ; as is very evident if we consider the Condition of that Part of the World, in any Age of it, which has been left wholly without a divine Revelation. We very much mistake the Force of natural Light, when we imagine, that all we find agreeable to the Sentiments of our own Minds, now that we have the Advantage of Revelation, might have been sufficiently discovered to us by the ordinary Improvement of our rational Powers ; whereas this only teaches us, how highly reasonable the divine Revelation is ; that the Duty GOD therein requires of us cannot be set before us, in it's proper Light, but our Reason immediately sees the Equity of it, and acknowledges it to be good ; and not what we should have been able to have seen, by the Strength of our own Reason, without Revelation. It no more infers the Capacity of our natural Reason, to discover the Duties revealed to us, because, by the Help of such a Revelation, we can trace the Reasonableness, and Equity, of the Duty, than our plain beholding *Jupiter's* Satellites, or *Saturn's* Ring, by the Help of a *Telescope*, or the *Animalcula* in a Drop of Water, by the Help of a Microscope, infers the Capacity of our Eyes, by their natural Strength, and without those Assistances, to behold them. The best Evidence of the Power of Nature is to be fetched from those Nations, and People who never had any Thing but natural Light to guide

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guide them ; and there we see, not only among the more barbarous Nations, but even the most civilized, and greatly improved in humane Learning, that the Generality of the People were destitute of the Knowledge of many moral Vertues, and their most learned Men were Ignorant of some, and that they were all absolute Strangers to true Happiness ; they knew not the only true GOD, the Way of serving of Him acceptably, nor how to enjoy his Favour : And hence we find the greatest, and best, of their Philosophers, as *Socrates*, and *Plato*, expressing their Sense of the Want, and their Hope, of a future, divine Revelation. There are, indeed, some moral Duties which do, as it were, lie uppermost in the humane Mind ; Reason easily, and without much Search, discerns them ; and there are some others which, probably, our natural Light might find out, by close Attention, and diligent Application. But the Bulk of Mankind are not very capable of so industrious an Enquiry, nor have they Leisure for it, if they were capable of it : and after all, the great and wonderful Discoveries which *Athens*, and *Rome*, have made of moral Vertue, left us in the Writings of their most learned Men, I am apt to think, that, upon a due Enquiry, it will be found, they owed it, not to the Force of their natural Powers, which some of them greatly improved, but to the Light they received from the Jewish Writings, with which they were undoubtedly conversant, which contained a Revelation from GOD, of what Nature would never have taught them. Since such was the Condition of Mankind, that, of themselves, they could not have come at the Knowledge of those things which were necessary

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for them to know, therefore GOD, in his great Goodness, and Compassion, has condescended to our Weakness, and Infirmary, in giving to us his written Law, firstly made known by Revelation from himself, wherein the whole of our Duty is fully, and clearly, set before us, and the only Way to true and endless Happiness is plainly discovered to us.

As the Case stands with us, at present, we can neither be recovered from the Imperfection of our Nature, nor our State, without a Mediator, a Redeemer, appearing on our behalf, becoming a Surety for us, obeying the Law, and undergoing the Penalty of it ; that is to say, bearing the Curse for us, that we might not fall under the Malediction of the Law, which we have broken. This natural Reason would never have discovered to us, but we should forever have wandered, as even the most polite Parts of *Athens*, and *Rome*, did, in Search after some certain Method, by which to appease the Anger of the Deity, whom, natural Conscience, from a Sense of our own manifold Miscarriages, would have told us, we had offended : and so we should have endlessly remained in the dark about the Way of Salvation, if GOD had not, in his great Compassion to us, given us a full, and clear Revelation thereof, in his holy Word.

Thus, we may see the Goodness of GOD to us, both in adjusting his Commandment to our rational Nature, requiring of us only a reasonable Service, a Service which, when we view it in the true Beauty of it, we cannot but acknowledge to be just, and equitable ; a Service which enobles our Minds, rectifies our Manners, sweetens our Relations, endears our Society,

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Society, and is every Way advantageous to us, and, at the same Time, making known to us thereby *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*, or the true Way unto Life, and Happiness. For he has told us, in his Word, that he has provided a Redeemer for us, even the Lord JESUS CHRIST, his only begotten Son, the dearly Beloved of the Father, *whom he hath set forth for a Propitiation for our Sin, thro' Faith in his Blood* (d); He has assured us of the Fulness, and Sufficiency, of the Merits of his Obedience, and Suffering, by *his Resurrection from the Dead*, of which he has given Assurance to all Men, where the Gospel is preached; and he graciously invites the greatest Sinner of us all to come to the Blessed JESUS, and yield the Obedience of Faith to him, and live. Thus *is GOD, in CHRIST, reconciling a guilty World unto himself, not imputing their Trespases unto them* (e). And if it had not pleased GOD thus to reveal his Designs of Grace and Favour to us, in his holy Word, we should, doubtless, have perished among those that are lost. Hence it is that his Commandment is called (f) *the Word of his Grace*: not only because, by it, he worketh Grace in our Souls, but in that it is an Act of free Grace, and rich Goodness, in GOD, to privilege us with a Divine Revelation.

The divine Commandment aims at the Recovery of us from all the sad Effects of our Apostacy, and to bring us unto GOD, and Happiness: and however natural Light was sufficient unto innocent Man, while as yet there was nothing to blind his Mind, and bias his Will, and Affections, so that he might have seen his

(d) *Rom. iii. 25.* (e) *2 Cor. v. 19.* (f) *Act. xx.*

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Duty clearly, and, possibly, have performed it fully, and so have secured the Favour of GOD, and his own uninterrupted and endless Happiness ; yet Sin has so obscured the Understandings of Men, and prejudiced the Powers of their Souls, in Favour of what is agreeable to the Senses, and the lower Appetites, and against what would any Ways abridge them of the Gratifications of Sense, that under the Influence of natural Light, alone, we should never be able to discover every Mystery of Iniquity, nor be sufficiently moved to part with our beloved Lusts ; and, of Consequence, we should never be recovered from the sad Effects of our Fall, to the Grace and Favour of our GOD. Hence the Apostle says, (g) *The natural Man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of GOD ; for they are Foolishness unto him ; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* And our Saviour observes, (h) *if the Light that is in thee be Darkness, how great is that Darkness ?* So that I cannot sufficiently wonder at it, that Men of Learning, and Thought, and such as set themselves up for a polite Way of thinking, and reasoning, should be so fond of their natural Light, as, for the Sake thereof, to discard divine Revelation ; when it is apparent, not only, that they are beholden to Revelation for their Master Thoughts, but, without it, they would be destitute of the clearest Light, and the strongest Arguments, that can have any moral Influence upon a reasonable Creature, to a constant and diligent attendance upon even moral Duties : that is they would be destitute of the best Means, to live like GOD, and to enjoy his Favour forever.

(g) 1 Cor. ii. 14. (h) Math. vi. 23.

But,

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BUT, blessed be GOD ; we are advantaged with a divine Revelation : and as this was the peculiar Profit of the *Jewish* Nation, above all People, *that unto them were committed the Oracles of GOD* (i) ; so now is it our special Advantage, since, through the tender Mercy of the most High, the Day-Star has risen, and shined, upon us *Gentiles*, and CHRIST has been given for a *Light, to lighten the Gentiles*, as well as to be *the Glory of his People Israel*. And as they did of old, so ought we to see, and own, the Goodness of GOD to us herein, and sing his Praise : (k) *He hath shewed his Word unto Jacob, his Statutes and Judgments unto Israel ; He hath not dealt so with any Nation, as for his Judgments they have not known them : Praise ye the LORD.* And indeed our Obligations to Gratitude, and Thankfulness, are so much the greater, by how much the Light of the Gospel hath shined more full, and clear, upon us, in the more abundant Discoveries of the Person, Nature, Offices, and Benefits, of the *Messiah*, and in the more evident Testimony, and Assurances, of Life and Immortality, than it did upon them ; and GOD has been graciously pleased to speak plainly unto us, whereas he spake very much in Parables, Types, and Shadows unto them.

O how great is his Goodness ! That thus *the Blessing of Abraham should come upon us Gentiles*, and unto us, now, *pertaineth the Adoption, and the Glory, and the Covenant, and the giving the Law, and the Service of GOD, and the Promises* ; that now unto us is *this Grace given, that, among us Gentiles, the unsearchable Riches of CHRIST are preached ; to the intent, that*

(i) *Rom.* iii. 1, 2. (k) *Pf.* cxlviii. 19, 20.

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now unto Principalities, and Powers, in heavenly Places, might be known, by the Church, the manifold Wisdom, and Goodness, of GOD : to use the Language of the inspired Apostle (1).

2. Is the Commandment of GOD exceeding broad ? then we may, from hence, learn the indispensable Obligation we are under to keep it ; that we ought always to keep, and do, all that the Lord our GOD hath commanded us : that we ought to be obedient, universally, and forever obedient.

Particularly,

(1.) From hence we learn our Obligation to keep the Commandments of GOD. The divine Original, the excellent Nature, and the blessed Design of the Commandment plainly, and strongly, infers this.

1. Our Obligation to a due Respect to the divine Commandment is plainly inferrable from the divine Original of it. For, if the GOD that made us, and all the World, and to whom we must finally be accountable, hath made known his Mind and Will to us, and shewed us what He requires of us, it is very certain, that then we are under all possible Tyes, and Engagements, to remember and do as he hath commanded us. Since it is the Commandment of GOD, and derives from the eternal Deity, we ought to give a suitable Entertainment to it, and believe all that he has made known to us, as Articles of our Faith, and obey all that is required of us, as Matter of our Practice.

Thus, we learn, from the divine Original of the Commandment, that we ought firmly to

(1) *Gal. iii. 14. Rom. ix. 4. Eph. iii. 8, 10.*

believe

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believe it : because every Word, which GOD hath spoken, is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation by us. For GOD *is not a Man, that He should lie (m) ; yea, it is impossible for GOD to lie (n) ; for the Lord is a GOD of Truth, Just, and Right, is He (o).* When therefore it can be said to us, thus saith *He that is holy, He that is true*, there is no Room for us to hesitate whether we ought to believe what is spoken, or no. Our own Reason tells us, that infallible Truth ought to be believed ; and we cannot possibly withhold our Assent from what we know to be infallibly true, without putting a Force upon ourselves, and doing Violence to our own Understanding. ‘ It is ‘ not to be wondered at, that they, who are ‘ possessed with the firm Perswasion of an in- ‘ fallible Chair, upon Earth, should swallow the ‘ grossest Absurdities, when they are dictated ‘ from that Chair, by an implicit Faith ; but ‘ the greatest Wonder is, that any Men should ‘ have so little Reason, as to imagine, that In- ‘ fallibility is to be found in a fallible Crea- ‘ ture. But that GOD is infallible, is most e- vident to our Reason, because he is infinite in Understanding, and therefore cannot possibly be imposed upon ; and infinitely pure, and Good, and therefore cannot deceive any, by giving them a false Account of Persons, or Things ; There are no natural, or moral, Imperfections in GOD, to render His Word suspicious, pre- carious, and fallible ; and hence it plainly fol- lows, that whatever he makes known to us, is infallibly true, and therefore to be credited, by us, purely upon His Word, whether we are

(m) Num. xxiii. 19. (n) Heb. vi. 18. (o) Deut. xxxii. 4.

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able to understand all that is contained in what He has spoken, or no. For the Supream Being, who has furnished us with Understanding, never meant to give us the Power to arraign his Veracity before the Barr of our Reason, nor may we assume it to ourselves to sit in Judgment upon the Truth of what he has said ; he has given us Reason, indeed, to judge of the Clearness, and Strength, of the Evidences that are brought in Proof of a divine Revelation, or whether what is pretended to have been spoken by GOD be really so, or no : and thus we are not, presently, to *believe every Spirit*, and bold Pretender that may come to us, as he says, in the Name of GOD, but are commanded *to try the Spirits whether they are of GOD*; (p) to search and prove their Credentials, whether they bring with them plain and full Evidences of their being sent from GOD ; and, if, upon Examination, it be found that their Credentials are authentick and valid, and sufficient to determine our reasonable Minds, that GOD thereby speaks to us, it is not for us then to proceed to try and judge, whether what GOD has thereby spoken be true, or no, before we will give credit to it ; no ; GOD demands it of us to believe what he has said, upon the Truth of his Word, and not upon our Capacity of discerning the Truth of it, or upon it's Agreement with such Maxims, and Principles, as we have taken up with, or such Ideas, and Conceptions of Things as we have formed in our Minds.

All the Difficulty here will lie in the Evidence, and Assurance, that what we are to believe is truly a divine Revelation ; and if the Evidences of

(p.) 1. *Joh. iv. 1.*

I. in m d- r- a- fit as to ne li- ed to, to y O, er ir a ; t d , r r , O , a r l a e

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a. Thing's being a Revelation from GOD are full, and strong, there ought then to be no Difficulty with us in our crediting of it ; because Truth itself can never deceive. It is readily acknowledged, that there are Mysteries in Religion, though some, I know, would perswade us there are none. I do not mean that the Proposition, in which the divine Revelation is expressed, is mysterious, for then, I suppose, we could not know the Terms of the Proposition, and so, I think, could not possibly believe it ; because it would contain just Nothing at all in it, nothing to us, whatever it might do to those that understand the Terms of it ; but it would be, to us, as a sealed Book, which we could neither read, know, or believe, any thing contained in it. But I mean, that, though the Proposition be ever so plain, and clear, and the Terms of it perfectly well understood by us, and so it hands to us, a certain Truth, sufficiently knowable, yet, it contains in it such Doctrines as are, in the Nature of them, mysterious to us, and beyond our Understanding how such Things can be. When a Proposition can be demonstrated to be true, (as what is proved to be from GOD certainly is,) it ought to be of no Weight with us, nor give us any Uneasiness, that it is ' impossible for us to comprehend, or ' frame any adequate or compleat Ideas, of the ' *Manner how* the Things so demonstrated can ' be ; or that there are such perplexing Diffi- ' culties on the other side, which merely for ' want of adequate Ideas of the *Manner* of the ' Existence of the Things demonstrated, are ' not easy to be cleared *. And it is very

* Vid. Dr. Sam. Clark, of the *Being and Attributes* &c. p. 10.

wrong

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wrong to reject, and disown, That for a divine Revelation, (and 'tis a false Way of arguing to conclude, that there can be no Evidences of it's being a divine Revelation,) because it contains such Doctrines in it as we are not able to comprehend : for this would be for us to make our own Reason, and Knowledge, and not the Truth of GOD, the Foundation of our Belief. And the Absurdity, and Falseness, of this Way of Reasoning, however polite, and conclusive, some Men may think it, will evidently appear, by applying it to the most familiar Instances in Nature. It is a very plain Proposition, the Terms of which are sufficiently understood by every Child of Ten Years old, That *Fire burneth*. But can any Thing be more ridiculous, and absurd, than for any Man, (and much more any Man pretending to a superior Genius, greater Learning, and Philosophy, and a more masterly Way of thinking,) to deny the Truth of this Proposition ; meerly because he knows not what Fire is, in the real Nature of it, nor how it burneth ? A Philosopher may shew some Smartness, indeed, and try his Brother Philosopher's Powers, by disputing against this Proposition, *there is local Motion*, which however plain, yet has it's Difficulties ; but should any one that sets up for a Philosopher, in sober Earnest, deny *local Motion*, and for this Reason, because he could not reconcile it to some Difficulties that occurred to him, he would only render himself justly ridiculous, and every unlettered Person could shew him his Folly, only by walking a few Steps. And is it not an equal Degree of Weakness, and Folly, for any Man to deny a divine Revelation, sufficiently confirmed, purely because he cannot understand

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stand the Nature of the Thing revealed, though the Terms of the Proposition are plain, and easy. Certainly, whatever GOD makes known is true, whether we understand the Nature of it, or no; and because GOD hath spoken it, therefore we are obliged to believe it. So that the Divine Original of the Commandment obliges us most firmly to believe all the Revelations, Doctrines, Promises, and Threatnings, contained in it.

And so does it equally oblige us to obey the Precepts of it. For GOD is not only true in what he says, but he is our Sovereign, and has an original, underived Right, by Virtue of his being GOD, to enjoin us what Law he pleases, and demand our Obedience to it. Therefore this is prefixed to the Epitome of the divine Commandment, *I am the Lord thy GOD (p)*; which shews us the unquestionable Right GOD has, as he is GOD, and our GOD, to command us, and the strong Obligation we are under to obey him: even such an Obligation as it is not in the Power of GOD himself to dispence with, and free us from the Bonds of. The Lord is our Maker; we are the Workmanship of his Hands, and because he hath made us, and not we ourselves, therefore he is our rightful Sovereign, and cannot but be so, unless we can cease to be his Creatures: He is *Lawgiver, our King, and our Judge*, whose Prerogative alone it is to be obeyed, in whatsoever he commands us; for the Excellencies of his Nature will not admit of any Injunction, but what is worthy of a GOD, and what is best for his Creatures; and his Commands cannot possibly interfere with any prior, and superiour, Obligation we are under, because there is none prior, none superiour to him. Besides he is

(p) *Exod. xx. 2.*

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our constant Preserver, and bountiful Benefactor, from whom we receive our All, and in whom all our Hopes are laid up ; So that Disobedience to any of his known Commands challenges his Right, and Authority, over us, denies him his peculiar Honour, and flurs the Lustre of all his Perfections, renounces our Dependance on him, and disowns his Kindness to us, and so is at once the highest Rebellion, and the blackest Ingratitude. But, since he is GOD alone, he is jealous for the Honour of his Name, and will not suffer any of his Glory to be taken from him, especially this natural Homage, Obedience to his Commands. And *thinkest thou this, O Man !* thou that livest at Defiance with GOD, thy Maker, in thy known Disobedience, and Contempt of his Authority, by doing what he has forbidden to thee, or by neglecting to do what he has required of thee, thinkest thou, *that thou shalt escape the righteous Judgments of GOD ?* Verily, whatever the Sinner may imagine, the Time will come, when GOD will cause his Jealousy to burn like Fire, and manifest his Indignation in flaming Rebukes, upon every wilfully Disobedient Soul, without a Possibility of their escaping.

2. The excellent Nature of the divine Commandment infers our Obedience. The more excellent the Rule of our Conduct is the more it deserves our Regards : for we ought ever to act as reasonable Creatures, and walk by the best Rules. But what is there so excellent, for the Rule of our Behaviour, as the Divine Law is ? How admirably is it adjusted to the Honour of the Law-giver, and to ourselves, our Nature, Capacity, and Interest ? 'Tis the only
perfect

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perfect Rule of Rectitude, and Purity. *The Words of the Lord are pure Words, as Silver tried in the Furnace, purified seven Times (q).* That is, it is wrought up to the highest Degrees of Excellency ; so that there wants nothing to compleat it's Perfection, and recommend it to our Acceptance : and needs must it be so, because it is the Result of infinite Wisdom. Thus it is a most perfect Rule to us, and we need never to fear our mistaking of our Way while we closely observe it. Beauty charms the Eye, and Harmony captivates the Ear, and we are not wont to act so unreasonably as not to give the Preference to what we know to be most excellent in its Kind. And what is there that can be more agreeable to the Sentiments of our rational Minds, than to govern ourselves, in all our Conduct, by that Rule which is best, which is true, certain, determinate, and safest for us ? which can never lead us out of the Way, and in our Conformity unto which, only, we act wisely, in doing what is best for us, and safely, in doing what we ought to do, both in our personal, and relative Capacity, whether in The Family, State, or Church ? So that because the Divine Commandment is most excellent in itself, it ought to be embraced by us, and observed as the Rule of our Walk ; and we cannot, knowingly, act contrary thereto, without doing Violence to right Reason, and exposing ourselves to our own just and severe Reproaches, by refusing to practise what, we are forced to own, is a most excellent Law. But this Argument will appear more fully under the next Head.

(q) *Ps.* xii. 6.

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3. The End and Design of the divine Commandment infers Obedience : whether we consider it, as it respects Society, or our Selves in particular.

For, if we consider the divine Commandment as it respects our Society, and Relation, to one another, so it is the just Rule, and Measure, of our Conduct, and Behaviour towards our Fellow-Creatures ; it shews us how we may be truly serviceable in the World, and promote the publick Good, and Welfare, by the Practice of these, and those Vertues, which will render us obliging, beneficent, and helpful, to all about us ; and by carefully avoiding such Vices, and Irregularities, in our Temper, and Behaviour, as would render us hurtful, and injurious, to one another. Thus it sweetens our Tempers, improves, and betters, our Manners, and lays it's Restraints upon our unruly Lusts and Passions, and prevents the dismal Effects of their unbridled Rage, and puts us upon the Exercise of universal Benevolence, and Goodness, and so makes us profitable Members of the Body Politick, Ornaments in the Church, and Delights in the Family. Now, certainly, a Law, so admirably calculated for the general Service of Mankind, ought to be obeyed. For without something of this, there would be no quiet, and peaceable, living in the World ; but every Man would turn a Beast of Prey upon his Neighbour, and the World would presently wear the Face of the wildest Anarchy, and Confusion. 'Tis the want of a due Regard to the divine Commandment which renders the World so bad as it is, at present : this introduces Tyranny, and Oppression, among the higher Orders of Men ; Mutiny, Sedition, and Rebellion, among Inferiours ;

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ours ; Injustice, Rapine, Cruelty, Hatred, Strife, Revenge, and the like, among Equals. And whilst the great Props of the World, Righteousness, and Truth, so much fail from among the Children of Men, it is no Wonder to hear Men complain of the Badness of the Times, and the Difficulty of living ; and, believe it, there is nothing, the Wit of Man can invent, that will ever correct, and mend, the Times, without a more conscientious Observation of the divine Commandment : the Thought of which alone, one would be ready to suppose, should have it's due Influence upon us all, to move us, to take more Heed to our Ways, and govern our selves according to the Word of GOD, that excellent Rule of all our Actions.

But then, if we consider the divine Commandment, as it more particularly relates to Ourselves, we shall see how indispensibly we are obliged to obey it.

For, as ever we would be freed from the domineering Power of those Lusts, and Passions, of Concupiscence, Covetousness, Pride, Anger, Wrath, Malice, Revenge, and such like, which fret, and disturb, our Minds, and give us the greatest Uneasiness ; as ever we would have our vicious, and unreasonable Prejudices, against what is truly good, and profitable to us, removed, and have our Understandings brightened, our manifold Disorders cured, and would possess ourselves, with Calmness, and Serenity, certainly we are concerned to be very careful to keep the Commandments of our GOD ; because nothing, without this, will give us the Mastery over what is prejudicial to us, and afford us inward Satisfaction. And let but the covetous Worldling, the impure Sensualist, and the raging Mad-man, think a little

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seriously, how much the Prevalency of those Lusts, and Passions, over him, is truly a Burden to him, and lays the Foundation of most, if not all, the Sorrows he meets with, what unaccountable Pains, and Difficulties, he is at to gratify them, what unknown Struggles to screen, and defend them, what perplexing, and sometimes inextricable, Broils they intangle him in, and, at the same Time, how much it debases him below the Dignity of his Nature, hurries him into unmanly Actions, and not seldom brings very grievous Hurt, and Damage, upon his Person, and worldly Interest ; I say, let him but seriously consider these things, and he will plainly see, that it is richly worth his while to endeavour to rid himself of such troublesome Companions, such baneful Inmates, by a close Adherence to the divine Commandment, which will render him Master of himself, and pleased with his own Actions.

Nay ; as ever we would entertain any well grounded Hope of eternal Happiness, we are indispensibly obliged to Obedience. For, though our Obedience to the Divine Commandment is, by no Means, meritorious of future Happiness, yet it is the sure Way to it ; the Way which the unerring Wisdom, and spotless Purity, of the Divine Nature have marked out for us ; and a Man may as reasonably hope, to support, his animal Life, without Food, as think to obtain true Happiness, which is the Life of the Soul, without Obedience ; Nay, more : for the Life of the Body is not so necessarily dependent upon Food, but that GOD can support it without any ; but GOD Himself cannot make a Soul happy, without Holiness ; because this would imply a Contradiction to the Divine Nature, and to our own. Hither looks

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all the Grace of the Gospel, as well as all the positive Commands of the divine Oracles, and JESUS CHRIST *is the Author of eternal Salvation unto them, and them only, that obey Him* (r). And who, in his Wits, would not think an eternal State of compleat Happiness worth his striving for? That Man, must first divest himself of his very Nature, who has no Desires after Happiness; and he must cease to think rationally, who can imagine he may be happy, without being obedient. Thus you see, that, since the Divine Commandment is exceeding broad, it necessarily infers our Obedience to it, and you see also how strong our Obligations to Obedience are.

(2.) As it infers Obedience, in the general, so does it particularly, with Respect to each, and every one of the divine Commands: that our Obedience be universal, and without Exception. For, they are all the same, in the Dignity of their Original, the Excellency of their Nature, and the same noble End and Design is pursued by them all. The same Authority that enacted one Command, has enacted all; they all bear the evident Impress of the supream Lord of all upon them; and therefore are all to be obeyed by us. If we urge upon you the Practice of any Duty, which GOD has not required of you, regard us not. Examine, with the noble *Bereans* (s), whether the things we preach to you, for divine Commands, are agreeable to the Mind and Will of GOD, or no; and if they are not, reject them; but if we publish to you nothing more than what GOD demands of you, then you

(r) *Heb.* v. 9. (s) *Act.* xvii. 11.

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ought to pay a due Regard thereunto, and do accordingly, and that, not because we tell you, This is your Duty, but, because the Lord your GOD requireth it at your Hands.

It is very possible, indeed, that we may not be able to see into the Reason of all the divine Commands, though we may of many of them; yet this is no sufficient Objection against our Obedience to them, when we know they are the Commands of GOD, any more than it is a sufficient Objection in a Servant, against his complying with the Commands of his Master, that he knows not to what End and Purpose his Master hath given him such a Command. A Master may, perhaps, command a thing, which yet may be very unworthy of himself, and unfitting for his Servant to comply with; because he is liable to Mistakes in his Judgment, or may be influenced by the Strength of his Passions in what he commands; and then that Servant may very reasonably be allowed modestly to expostulate the Case with his Master, and finally refuse to obey his Master, in that thing which is contrary to the Commands of a superior Power, to whom he is under Obligation to obey. But the infinitely wise, and good GOD cannot possibly be guilty of any such Error, as to command any thing unworthy of Himself, or unfitting for us to do, and has sufficient, and good Reasons, for every one of his Commands, though we are not able to see them: So that it is enough for us to know that it is the Command of GOD; our Business is to resign our Wills intirely into the divine Will. For, though we know not why He hath commanded such a thing, yet we know why we ought to obey that Command, namely,

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ly, because God hath commanded it. (t) *Hath not the Lord GOD of Israel commanded thee ?* is sufficient to silence all Cavils, and put us upon the most ready Obedience. Nor is this to make GOD an arbitrary Being, as some Men count Arbitrariness. Though Arbitrariness is of an ill Sound, when it is applied unto Men, who are liable to Mistakes, and are accountable to a superior Power, and therefore have no Right to set up their Wills as the Rules of their own, much less of others Actions ; yet, rightly understood, when it is applied unto God, it is no other than his acting *His own Pleasure* (u), and His performing *all things according to the Counsel of his own Will*, (w) without being accountable unto us, or any of his Creatures, for the Reason of his Actions, or Designs : and this the Perfection, and absolute Supremacy of the divine Nature challenges as his indisputable, and unalienable Right : and thus GOD is arbitrary, and it is his peculiar Glory that He is so ; that is, it is the Greatness, and Glory, of the divine Being, and what none but GOD can challenge, that his Will alone, without Dependence on, or Accountableness to, any other Being, or any Thing out of Himself, gives Law unto all Creatures : His Will, I say, which, from the Perfection of his Nature, is above all Possibility of being erroneous, or biassed with Prejudices, and ill Affections, and therefore cannot possibly be subject to Caprice, and Humour, as the Will of a finite, and fallible Being may. And sure I am, that it is an Argument of the greatest Arrogancy, and of an Arbitrary Temper, in the worst Sense, for any Man to as-

(t) *Judg.* iv. 6. (u) *Isa.* xlvi. 10. (w) *Eph.* i. 11.

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sume to himself a Power that does not, in the least, belong to him, and set up his own Will in Opposition to the divine, and determine with himself, to obey none of the divine Commands, until GOD is pleased, first, to be accountable unto him for the Reasonableness of them ; or if, forsooth, he is not able to discern that there is good Reason for the Command, that then he will have nothing to do with it. For what is this but to set himself up in the Throne of GOD, and to bring the Almighty to his Bar. *My Soul, come not thou into their Secret, unto their Assembly, mine Honour, be not thou united !* The infinitely Great GOD is the sole Disposer of his own Actions, and has an absolute, uncontrollable, Sovereignty over all His Creatures, and therefore has a Right to be obeyed by them, in whatsoever he commands them. For, I suppose, and, doubtless, it will be readily granted, that GOD, who is infinite in Power, and Wisdom, and Goodness, has a Right to do whatsoever is consistent with himself ; and that GOD perfectly knows what is consistent with himself, tho' we do not ; and from hence, I conclude, he never will, or can, do, or order to be done, any thing but what is consistent with himself : and from hence, it follows, that there is no Room for us to hesitate in our Obedience to any thing, we know to be the Command of GOD, tho' we should be perfectly ignorant of the Design, or Reasonableness of the Command, until we can be guilty of the Vanity, and Blasphemy, to think ourselves wiser than GOD, and that we know, what is consistent with himself, better than he does himself. So that, whatever GOD has required of us, it is our Duty to perform without

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out disputing the Legality, or Reasonableness of it ; His Will being the highest Law and Reason of all our Actions. For, though there may be what is called the Fitness, or Unfitness, of Things, arising from their Relation, Proportion, and Dependence, which are of excellent Use in Philosophy, without Revelation ; yet to us who enjoy a divine Revelation, these can be no false Rule for us to go by in our Conduct, nor be the *formal Obligation* of our Obedience to the divine Law : because, as a great Man observes, * *What these eternal and unalterable, Relations, Respects, or Proportions of things, with their consequent Agreements, or Disagreements, Fitnesses or Unfitnesses, absolutely and necessarily are in themselves ; That also they appear to be, to the Understandings of all Intelligent Beings ; except those only, who understand Things to be what they are not, that is, whose Understandings are either very imperfect, or very much depraved :* Where, though doubtless that learned Person designed to evidence that the Fitness, or Unfitness, of Things, is the *formal Obligation* of our Obedience, and Rule of our Behaviour, yet, I humbly conceive, that, by his Exception, he truly evinces the contrary : For, alas, the Exception, which he makes, is the very Case of all Mankind, since the Fall, whatever it be of Angels, namely, that their *Understandings are very imperfect, and very much depraved.* That the Mind of Man, since the Fall, is very *imperfect* is evident, from the little real Knowledge any attain unto after all their diligent Study and Search, and the much less Knowledge the Bulk of Mankind can attain to, for want of Leisure, if not of Capacity ; and from

* Dr. S. Clark, Dem. of the Being &c. p. 183.

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the different Sentiments, which different Persons, (though as far as we can judge, of equally clear Perception, and Understanding,) have of one and the same thing, in many Instances ; and from the said *Author*, who asserts, || that “ *what* “ is for the *good of the whole Creation*, in very “ many Cases, none but an *infinite Understanding* can possibly judge ; and from the sacred Scripture, which assures us, that naturally Men *have their Understandings darkened* (x). So that, from the evident Imperfection of our Understandings, we are not able clearly to discern, in many Cases at least, the absolute and necessary Relation, and Fitness or Unfitness of things, in themselves, and therefore can by no Means, with Safety, make it the Rule of our Conduct. And besides this Imperfection, there is evidently a very considerable Depravity upon our Understandings, which is seen in their being biassed and bribed, by Passions, and Prejudices, swaying the Minds of those that seem to be most free from them ; and the same *Author* acknowledges, † *a great and general Corruption and Depravation*. Hence though we may be able to discern the Fitness or Unfitness of Things, in many Instances, yet, since, from our *Imperfection* and *Depravity*, in many other we do not ; and in some we cannot, therefore the Will of GOD, the supream Lawgiver, which Will is always wise and good, is the only sure and certain Rule, to us, to regulate our Actions by ; and consequently the Will of GOD, made known to us, is the highest Law and Reason of our Conduct, and not our own Conception of the Fitness or Unfitness of Things. And our not being able to discern the Fitness, or Unfitness, of

|| p. 223. (x) *Eph.* iv. 18. † p. 254.

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Things, can be no sufficient Reason why any Man should refuse to observe that Law, or believe that Truth, which GOD hath clearly revealed to us. For “ since, said that learned “ *Author*, † the *natural* Attributes of GOD, his “ infinite Knowledge, Wisdom and Power, sets “ him infinitely above all Possibility of being “ *deceived by Error*, or of being *influenced by* “ *wrong Affections* ; ’tis manifest his divine “ Will cannot but always and necessarily determine itself to choose to do what in the “ whole is absolutely Best and Fittest to be “ done ; therefore his divine Will which necessarily orders what is most fitting for us to do, is, to us, the best Rule by which to Judge of the Fitness, or Unfitness, of Things, and the strongest *formal Obligation* upon us to Obedience ; and consequently our Obedience must be universal and extend to every Command, that has the Authority of GOD stamped upon it, whether we see the Reason of it, or no.

We may not therefore think to excuse ourselves with a partial Obedience, or in obeying such Commands only as are suitable to our particular Temper, and Interest in the World, or which we can see the Reason of ; nor may we hope to enjoy the Benefit of the exceeding broad Commandment, unless our Obedience extend to every particular Duty required of us : that is, unless we sincerely endeavour after universal Obedience to every divine Command. The Commandment is all of a Piece, and therefore called, the *Commandment*, in the singular Number. We must sincerely endeavour after an Obedience as extensive as the Commandment is, or it will be no true Obedience, in the Sight of GOD. Hence is that

† p. 184.

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of the Apostle James, (x) *Whoſoever ſhall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, is guilty of all.* He is guilty of denying the Authority of the ſupream Lawgiver, and guilty of breaking the Unity of the Commandment; and from the ſame Principle, by which he allows himſelf in Diſobedience to any Part of the Law, he would alſo tranſgreſs the whole, under equal Temptations, and Opportunities. It muſt therefore be our great Care, as ever we would be eſteemed obedient Subjects, to comply with the juſt Expectation of GOD, and his earneſt Deſire, of an univerſal Obedience. *O that there were ſuch an Heart in them!* (ſays he,) *that they would fear me, and keep all my Commandments, always, that it might go well with them, and their Children, forever* (y).

Thus, we muſt not content ourſelves with being Legalists, by obſerving only the moral Duties of the divine Commandment, without taking due Care to obey evangelical Precepts; for the Young Man, in the Goſpel, could ſay, (z) *all theſe have I kept from my Youth up;* and yet our Lord ſaid to him, in the next Verſe, *One Thing thou lackeſt.*

And it will be but a vain Preſumption in us, to think that we are truly obedient to the Precepts of the Goſpel, and call ourſelves Chriſtians, while the Duties of the moral Law are neglected by us. *Wilt thou know, O vain Man, that Faith, without Works, is Dead* (a). Moral, and Poſitive, Natural, and Evangelical, Precepts, muſt all, in their proper Place, be duely regarded by us; *theſe ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone* (b): they muſt go Hand in Hand

(x) Jam. ii. 10. (y) Deut. v. 29. (z) Luke xviii. 21.

(a) Jam. ii. 20. (b) Matth. xxiii. 23.

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with us, and our Obedience, in our sincere Aim, and Endeavours, must universally extend to them all and to every Article included under them.

I will only add,

3. Lastly ; Thus too it infers the Constancy, and Perpetuity, as well as the Universality of our Obedience : that we persevere in our Obedience as long as we live. For the divine Authority ever remaineth good, and GOD is our Sovereign, in one Part of our Lives as well as in another, yea, as long as we have any Being ; and the Commandment remains the same excellent Commandment, to Day, that it was Yesterday ; and as that is not more holy, just, and good, at one Time, than at an other, so neither is it less Obligatory upon us at any Time, but always abides in full Force, and Virtue, and therefore ought always to be obeyed by us ; Every Day we live, and all the Day long, and as long as we live in the World. So said the devout *Psalmist*, (c) *I have enclined my Heart to perform thy Statutes, always, even unto the End.* We may not imagine, therefore, that there are any particular Seasons for Obedience, and others in which we may lawfully interrupt our Obedience ; for, though there may be special Seasons for This, or That, particular Branch of our Duty, and sometimes Lesser Duties must give place to Greater ones, according to that of our Saviour, (d) *I will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice*, yet, with Respect unto the whole of the divine Commandment, there is no Part of Time can be called, a special Season for Obedience, because there is not, nor can there be, any Season for Disobedience. GOD allows us no Part of

(c) *Psal.* cxix. 112. (d) *Matth.* ix. 13.

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our Lives to Sin in, though he allows us, at proper Seasons, to call off our Minds, from those Duties which are more toilsome, and burdensome, to us, unto those that are more easy, and pleasant ; but He demands of us a constant, persevering, Course of Duty, throughout the whole of our State of Probation, and Trial, in this World ; that we *serve him in Righteousness, and Holiness, all the Days of our Life* (e) : that we *patiently continue in the Way of well doing* (f) : that we *hold fast the Profession of our Faith, without Wavering* (g) : and that we be *stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord ; forasmuch as we know that our Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord* (h). If this were well remembred, it would have a mighty Influence upon us, to make us more exact, in our Obedience to the Commands of GOD, throughout the whole Course of our Lives ; and we should not so easily be prevailed upon, to allow such wide Gaps in our Duty, as are often to be found among us.

(e) *Luk. i. 75.* (f) *Rom. ii. 7.* (g) *Heb. x. 23.* (h) *1 Cor. xv. 58.*

SERMON



S E R M O N VIII.

P S A L M CXIX. 96.

I have seen an End of all Perfection ; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

THE last Opportunity of discoursing upon this Subject, I entred upon the Improvement of the second Doctrine from the Words, viz. The Commandment of GOD is exceeding broad ; and I inferred from it,

1. The wonderful Goodness, Mercy and Compassion of GOD to a miserable World, in making a clear Revelation of his Mind and Will, in such important Affairs, wherein our own Reason would not have been sufficient to have directed us, and all with the blessed Design of recovering of us to Rectitude, and Happiness ; which special Advantage demands of us our grateful Tribute of Thankfulness, and Praise.

I have also inferred,

2. The indispensable Obligations we lie under to keep the Commandment of GOD ; that is, to believe all that GOD has told us, and perform

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form all that he requireth of us. 'Tis the Commandment of the GOD that made us, who is our supream Ruler, and to whom we must be accountable ; 'tis a most excellent Commandment in itself, and respecting Society, and particular Persons ; and therefore as ever we would act reasonably, possess the Peace of our own Minds, and be happy in the Favour of our GOD, we are indispenibly obliged to obey it, and that every Part thereof, as the Will of GOD concerning us, and be constant and persevering in our Obedience to the End, without allowing any Interruptions therein.

And I now shall go on to a Third Inference from this Doctrine ; viz.

3. This Doctrine teaches us, That Religion is our truest Wisdom. For what is Religion, but our keeping the Commandments of GOD ? Religion indeed includes in it, that we believe that there is a GOD, and that we believe the Commandment, as the Rule of our Duty, is from GOD, and that the Way, in which GOD hath signified to us that he is willing to be reconciled unto us, and admit us to his Favour, namely, in and by his Son JESUS CHRIST, is the only Way of our obtaining Mercy with him : but yet all our Faith in GOD, and in his Son JESUS CHRIST, all our Fear of GOD, and Love to him, all terminates in this, as the Sum of true Religion, and what includes all the Rest, that we readily obey this GOD, in whatsoever he commands us ; Therefore the Preacher said, *(i) Fear GOD, and keep his Commandments ; for this is the whole of Man.* His whole Duty is included in this,

(i) Eccl. xii. 13.

and

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and his whole Happiness is laid up in it. Since therefore the Commandment of GOD is so exceeding broad, as to reach to us in all our Capacities, and Relations, and Designs to better us, as rational Creatures, to render our Lives comfortable to us here, and to make us compleatly happy hereafter, then it must needs be the truest Wisdom in us, thus to be religious. And, indeed, what Wisdom is there equal to this? (k) *Unto Man, he said, Behold, the Fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is Understanding.* Let a Man be ever so worldly wise, though he should understand all the Secrets of Nature, and of Art, and be deeply read in the most refined Politicks, yet, without Religion, he has not the Wisdom, and Understanding, of a Man; and his whole Life will be but an ill concerted Design, which will come far short of his true End, and all his fine Schemes, his Labour, and Toil, will be in vain, and to no good Purpose: when a Storm gathers thick and dark about him, and the Waves of Adversity beat heavy upon him, he will be destitute of every thing that can afford him any solid Comfort; and when the gloomy Prospect of Death, and the Grave, appears, with all its Terrors, before him, he will not be able to look, with Calmness, into the future World, and comfort his Heart with the refreshing View of a State of compleat, and endless, Happiness reserved for him. For his inquisitive Search, and clearest Discoveries, his closest Thought, and greatest Labour, have been about those things which are of the least, and most temporary, Concernment to him, while he has contented himself to remain a Stranger to that

(k) *Job xxviii. 28.*

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which

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which is his main Interest, and of everlasting Consequence unto him : the Folly of which is apparently much greater than that, of him, who should spend all his Thoughts, and Time, about catching of Butterflies, to the Neglect of the necessary Provision for the Support of his Body. Whereas, he that is truly religious takes a prudent Course to secure his main Interest, to enjoy the Favour of his GOD, and possess everlasting Peace and Joy ; and let the World frown upon him, and all things about him be thrown into Confusion, and his whole Life, here, be filled up with various Afflictions, and Sorrows, yet, in the midst of all, he can look within himself with Calmness and Pleasure, at the Thought of his having done his Duty ; and can look forward with a joyful Prospect of an happy Issue to all his Afflictions, secured to him in the Promise of that GOD, who is faithful, and will do it : Nay, though he should be forced for the Sake of this his main Interest, to suffer in lesser, and more trifling Matters ; yet, so long as his greatest Concerns are safe, he has evidently acted the Part of a Wise Man, in making a lesser Interest stoop, and give Place, to the greater. So, like *the wise Merchant, having found one Pearl of great Price, he readily sells all that he has,* parts with things of lesser Value, and buys it (1).

Besides, the Wisdom of Religion appears in this, that a Man does nothing herein that he will afterwards have any Reason to be ashamed, and repent of ; whereas he that leads an irreligious Life, in Disobedience to the Divine Commandment, will certainly, as he has just Cause for it, be ashamed, and heartily sorry

(1) *Math. xiii. 45.*

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for his Folly, sooner, or later : If he ever see his Error, while he has Opportunity to correct it, his past Folly will cost him many an uneasy Thought, and make him very restless ; and his Repentance, though it be the best thing he can possibly do, will be attended with inward Shame, and Regret, and he will bitterly reflect upon himself, and most sadly condemn himself, as a vile, wretched, loathsome Creature, who by his Rebellions against his Sovereign, and Ingratitude to his best Friend, has deserved Hell a Thousand Times over. But if he should go on in his Irreligion, until Death, and Judgment, overtake him, how severely, then, will he reproach, and condemn himself ? What pointed Stings will pierce deep into his very Soul, at the Reflection on his past Folly ? What inexpressible Horror will take hold upon him, at the Thought of his former mad Course of Life ? How dreadfully will he become his own Tormentor, and that throughout an endless Eternity ? Whereas, he that lives religiously, in Obedience to the divine Commands, is always doing what he ought to do, what becomes him as a rational Creature, what greatly improves and betters him, and therefore what will forever set easy and comfortably about him, and what will afford him unspeakable Satisfaction in the Review of it.

Nay ; if the religious Man should have deluded himself, with the pleasing Hopes, of living happily forever, in an other World, after he has acted his Part in this, and, instead of his partaking of that Joy and Satisfaction he lived in Expectation of, should, at last, die, and perish, like the Beast, yet has he acted the wise Part : because he has denied himself

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of nothing that was fitting for a wise Man to allow himself in, he has had the Pleasure, and Satisfaction, as he went along, to carry himself regularly, and behave decently, and to do nothing but what was worthy of him, as a Man ; and all this he did upon, at least, the probable, Hopes of a happy Eternity, as the full Reward of all : and, if after all, he should miss of what he hoped for, by ceasing to have any Being beyond the Grave, yet he will truly have lost nothing, by his Religion, but what he could very well spare, without any real Damage to himself, and he will then be in no Capacity to receive any Uneasiness, at his Disappointment, or to feel any Degree of Misery. But he that lives irreligiously truly gains nothing, by his Irreligion, but what he had better be without, namely, an indecent, misbecoming, and unmanly Conduct, which exposes him to the Censure, and Disesteem, of the thinking Part of Mankind, and uneasy Reflections within himself, which he cannot, at Times, be without ; and all the Liberty he has taken to gratify the irregular Appetites of Flesh and Sense, besides it's reducing him upon a Level with the Brute, has been with a View to some probable Hope, (for no Man is, or can be sure of it,) that he shall have no Being in an other World ; which Hope if he should find himself, at last, mistaken in, he would be unavoidably miserable, and that forever. So that, upon Supposition, that the future State is only probable, and that there were equal Reason to conclude, that it will, or will not, be, the religious Man is, by far, the wiser of the two ; because he has provided for that which possibly may happen, and that with no real Disadvantage to himself in his present

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sent State, while the irreligious has made no real Gain to himself, by a Life of Disobedience, and is utterly unprovided for the fatal Chance, which, for ought he can possibly know, may, at last, happen to him.

But then, whatever profane Men may think of it, there is no such Chance, whether we shall have a Being in an other World ; no, my Brethren, it is an undoubted Certainty, founded upon solid Principles of Reason, and evidenced by the clear Light of indisputable Revelation, that we shall exist after we leave this World, that Death does not make a final and full End of us, but we pass, from hence, into an other World, where we shall have assigned unto us a Portion answerable to our Conduct in this : and then who will be found to be the wise Man ? He that has aforehand been thoughtful about that State he is passing into, and done all he can to render it a comfortable and happy State to him ; or, he that has cast off all Thoughts of Futurity, and has been doing all he can to render it a State of endless Misery, and insupportable Torment to him ? Verily, when all things are duely considered, it will certainly be found, that Religion is our truest Wisdom. Well then might *Solomon*, the wisest of Men, say, (m) *Who so keepeth the Law is a wise Son* ; and, (n) *He that geteth Wisdom loveth his own Soul, and he that keepeth Understanding shall find good.*

4. We may from hence infer the very great Evil of wilfully making light of, and contemning, the divine Commandment. Is the Commandment, a Revelation from GOD, partaking

(m) *Prov.* xxviii. 7. (n) *ib.* xix. 8.

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of the Purity of his Nature, with the Stamp of his royal Authority upon it ? Is it exceeding broad, as it reaches to every one of us, and every Part of us, includes our whole Duty, and consults our truest Interest, in this World, and the next ? What an high Crime, and misdemeanor, must it then be, for any to make Light of it, and pour their Contempt upon it, as though it were mean, and despicable, and not worthy to be treated with Decency, and good Manners : What is this but to pour Contempt upon GOD himself, who speaks to us in his Word ? Surely the Oracles of the great GOD ought to be forever sacred with us, and to be thought, and spoken, of, with the greatest Reverence. One would be ready to think, that the Purity of its Morals, the Sublimity, and Majesty, of its Sentiments, and the Nobleness, and Gravity, as well as Familiarity, and Plainness, of its Diction, besides the Remembrance that Life, or Death, turns upon our Regards to it, should secure it our greatest Veneration, beyond that of any other Writings whatever ; because no other Writings, whatever, can pretend to come near the Sanctity, and Majesty, of the sacred Scriptures ; nor so nearly concern us, in our best, and lasting Interest. And yet, as if it were not enough to live, and act, contrary to the Documents of this sacred Word, are there not a Generation, (*O how lofty are they in their own Eyes !*) who add to all their other Crimes the prodigious Guilt, of pleasing themselves in breaking their scurrilous Jests upon the holy Writings, and scruple not to turn the divine Oracles into Burlesque ? What can be more contrary to that Reverence and Esteem which is due to a Revelation from GOD, than
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for Persons to account themselves witty in their profane Drollery upon it ? And yet, for ought all that the wittiest of them can say, it may possibly be a Revelation from GOD, and no other than GOD himself speaking in that Word which they condemn. Nor is it any Argument of the Meanness of the sacred Scriptures, or their want of a divine Original, that Persons of but little real Wit, though of a great Deal of Profaneness, and Malice, can play their silly Squibs, upon the Doctrines, or Precepts, contained in them, any more than it is an Argument of the Meanness of a noble Man's Character, that a contemptible *Buffoon* wears the Title of *my Lord* : Though with some, it may be thought a sufficient Confutation of the divine Original of the Scriptures, that they can strain a low Banter, or break a homely Jest upon them. But, let such Men know, that Bantering, and Jestings, are not Reasoning ; and they must give us other Proofs of their supposed masterly Way of thinking, before we can yield up our Understandings, and Consciences, to their Direction : yea, they must give us other Evidences, than they do, of their being Friends to Reason, whatever Shape they appear in, before they are fit to be hearkened to. A Man is never the less valuable for a Monkey's ridiculous Representation of him. What is there so sacred, and true, so beneficent, and serviceable, which a very low, but a very licentious, Wit, may not turn into Ridicule ? But of all Wit this is the most foolish, and the most dangerous : This is to sport, in the Dark, with edge Fools, and to act the Part of *Solomon's* mad Fool, (o) who *casteth Fire-*

(o) *Prov.* xxvi. 18.

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brands, Arrows, and Death, and crieth, am I not in Sport ? because it is to play the Fool in a Matter of the greatest Consequence that can be, in which, if a Man be mistaken in his Jest, and for ought he knows he may be mistaken, he does himself the greatest possible Injury, as well as to many about him ; he runs on inconsiderately, with a broad Laugh, and hideous Grin, and hurries many unthinking Fools, with the empty Noise, into everlasting Burning. Nor, know I any Sin, that, in our Day, may be supposed to come nearer to *the Sin against the Holy Ghost*, (if it be not the very same,) *which shall never be forgiven, neither in this World, nor in that which is to come*, than for a Man designedly to ridicule the Scriptures, and the Miracles recorded in it, as little Tricks of Juggling, and Legerdemain ; because such a Man Evidently discovers himself to be under the Power of Malice, and Rage, against our holy Religion, and it's Author, who can, for the Sake of his Enmity to them, become so great an *Enemy to Reason* ; by which Means he stands *absolutely Self-condemned*. And whatever the profane Droll may think of himself, and however he may gain the Laugh, of the vain World on his Side, he will find, in the Conclusion, that he has been all the while sporting himself to his own undoing, by passing the Flout, and Jeer, upon his Maker, and his Judge, and has Jested away his Soul, and his Happiness forever. Of all Persons, such should be had in the greatest Contempt, and Abhorrence, by us, because of their scurrilous spitting in the Face of our heavenly Father, and their bold Attempt to undermine, by the most unmanly, and sordid, Methods, the
very

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very Foundations of our most holy Religion, and bury the noblest Structure in the contemptible Ruins.

Thus also, it argues a Slight cast upon the divine Commandment, for any to form new Notions, and Schemes of Religion, and Ways of Worship, not enjoined, or warranted, by the Word of GOD. For, as GOD himself knows best, what Worship, and religious Service, is most agreeable to his Nature, and Perfections, and consonant to his grand Design of the Salvation of Sinners, through the Merits of his Son ; so he has been pleased to reveal to us, in his holy Word, what that Worship is, which is acceptable and pleasing to him ; and his Commands, therein, extend not only, to every one of us, but, to the whole of our Duty, relating to GOD, and his Worship, as well as to our whole Duty to our Fellow Creatures. It must therefore be looked upon as no less than, a reproaching the exceeding broad Commandment with Imperfection, for us to interpolate it with Inventions of our own ; and an Impeaching the Wisdom of GOD, for us to set up Modes of Worship which he hath not enjoined ; and an arrogating to ourselves the Authority of GOD, and his Dominion in his own House, for us to impose our own Schemes upon others, and make our new found Services the Terms of Communion in the Church of GOD ; and, at the same Time, such pernicious Principles do but give the Scope to vain conceited Minds, full of themselves, and contemning all beside, when once they have gotten sufficient Power on their Side, to impose upon us what new Religion they please, when ever they shall think it fitting to do so. If, therefore, we would approve ourselves unto GOD, and not make light of his

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his Commandment, we ought to be careful, in all Parts of our religious Worship, to conform ourselves, not to the Dictates of Men, but, to the Rules laid down in the Word of GOD. (p) *To the Law, and to the Testimony ; if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in them.*

Furthermore ; It is a Slight and Contempt cast upon the Word of GOD, for Persons to neglect to make that due Improvement of it, which it is designed for, to instruct them in the Way of Righteousness. The great Design of GOD's holy Word is, *to convert the Soul, to make wise the simple, to rejoice the Heart, and enlighten the Eyes,* and to guide us in the Path of our Duty, and the Way to true and endless Felicity. Now, in order to have this blessed End promoted, 'tis necessary that Persons act the rational Part, in a diligent Application of the Means to the End, by a due Improvement of the divine Commandment, so as that it may be a Lamp to their Feet, and a Light unto their Path. But if they refuse to make a wise Improvement of it, to this great and good End, 'tis because, either, they contemn the End, as not worth their regarding, or, slight the Means, as not well adapted to the End : either of which is to make light of the Word of GOD, by which only we have the great End, the Purity, and Happiness of Man ascertained, and the best Way to attain this End pointed out to us.

This therefore is their Sin, and Folly, who live without reading the Word of GOD, daily, with close Application of Mind to what they read ; for 'tis plain they neglect, and slight, the best Means to promote the highest End ; and it may

(p) *Isa. viii. 20.*

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be said to them, in the Language of the wise Man, (q) *wherefore is there a Price, in the Hand of a Fool, to get Wisdom, seeing he hath no Heart to it?* The greatest of Men, as well as the least, owe this to the sacred Bible, carefully to inform themselves in the Nature, and Importance of it, what it discovers to them, and what it requires of them; this their own Interest demandeth of them; this the great GOD commands them. (r) *When he (the King) sitteth upon the Throne of his Kingdom, he shall write (have) a Copy of this Law; — and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the Days of his Life; that he may learn to fear the LORD his GOD, to keep all the Words of this Law, and these Statutes to do them.* And how can any Man hope to fear GOD, and keep his Commandments? who, so despiseth the divine Commandment, as to cast it behind his Back, and is the Fool that hateth Instruction.

And so, when Persons refuse to come to the place of Publick Worship, that they may hear the Word of GOD preached, his Commands explained, and enforced, 'tis evident they make light of this holy Word, because they neglect to improve it, as they ought to do. It has pleased GOD in his great Wisdom, and Goodness, to make Use of the Word of Reconciliation, by the Ministry of Men, appointed for this End, to bring the Soul of the poor Sinner home to GOD in CHRIST, by a hearty Belief of all Gospel Truths, and sincere Practice of all Gospel Duties; in this Way our blessed LORD, and his Apostles, after him, converted Sinners, and saved their Souls from Death. But now, when any wilfully absent themselves from the Publick Worship, and refuse to hear the Word preached, whatever Pretence they may have there-

(q) *Prov. xvii. 16.* (r) *Deut. xvii. 18, 19.*

for,

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for, from their Conceit of their own Knowledge, or low Esteem of the Preacher, 'tis evident they despise Prophesying, and contemn the Word of Life; which, if they truly valued, they would embrace all proper Opportunities to receive their Portion of, as they do the returning Seasons to entertain the Food of their Bodies. GOD therefore charges it against his rebellious People, of old, (s) That, *they cast away the Law of the LORD of Host,* (they put it from them, and desired to have nothing to do with it,) *and despised the Word of the Holy One of Israel.* And verily, when Fools thus despise Wisdom, and the Means leading to it, their Sin is greatly aggravated thereby, and their Condemnation will be sadly increased; because they despise GOD, who speaketh to them in his Word, and despise their own Souls, which the Word is the designed Means to promote the Salvation of: and therefore, unto such Sinners, that awful Warning belongeth, (t) *Behold, ye Despisers, and wonder, and perish.*

5. From hence we learn, how short we all come of the Rule in our Obedience, and what need the very best of us all have, humbly and earnestly, to implore the pardoning Mercy of GOD, through the Merits of JESUS CHRIST, that we may find Acceptance with him. Is the Commandment of GOD thus exceeding broad? Doth it extend to every Duty, and require an exact Obedience of us, in Heart, and Life, and that without any, the least, allowed and wilful Defects? Then, upon an Examination of ourselves, we cannot but see, that, after all our Care to perform our Duty,

(s) *Iſa. v. 24.* (t) *Mat. xiii. 41.*

and

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and preserve ourselves pure, and untainted with any Error, we have come greatly short of the Rule, and that even in the very best of our Performances. Alas, for us ; we daily sin in Thought, in Word, and in Deed ; and though any of us should not have allowed ourselves in any of the greater, and more heinous, Transgressions of the divine Law, as in swearing and Drunkenness, Uncleaness, Falshood, Malice, or the like atrocious Crimes, yet there is enough of Obliquity, cleaving to all we do, to justify the holy and righteous GOD if He should condemn us. For he that would hope to escape the righteous Condemnation of the great Judge, upon the Account of his own Performances, must be able to lay claim to a perfect sinless Obedience of his own ; because, whatever the Grace of GOD, according to the Dispensation of the Gospel, might do, in abating the utmost Exactness of the Law, in it's Demands upon us, for the Sake of a Mediator interposing on our Behalf, yet, the Law itself, which is the Rule to us, allows of no Failure, in our Obedience, without our falling under the condemning Power of it ; nor will the Honour of the Sovereign, separate from the Grace of the Gospel, admit of any Repugnancy in us to his rightful Authority, without his proper Animadversions upon us for it. And where is the Man, (the Man JESUS only excepted,) that can pretend to a perfectly sinless Obedience to the divine Law ? For in Order to any Man's being perfectly righteous before GOD, by Vertue of his own Obedience, it is absolutely necessary, that there be the most exact Agreement between the divine Will, made known to him ; and his Obedience, without the least
Failure

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Failure, or Defection from the right Line of his Duty: for if he should, in the least Degree, go off from the Rule, his Obedience would not then be perfectly agreeable to it. It is therefore but a vain Pretention for any to imagine themselves altogether perfect, and sinless. For so, *there is not a just Man upon Earth, that doth good, and sinneth not* (a): and, *if we say we have no Sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us* (b). And yet, possibly, we may find many carnal Professors, who, like the *Publican*, are very ready to Justifie themselves, saying, *GOD, I thank thee, I am not like this, and the other Man; I do this, and that; they are morally honest, and do no Injury to any Man, (they say,) and it may be they are charitably disposed, and so not only do no Hurt to any, but they do, (they think,) what good they can.* But is this to be perfect, and sinless? Let no Man flatter himself with a vain Delusion. Come to the Word of GOD, view thy self in that clear Glass, and, doubtless, thou will then plainly see, that there are many Blemishes upon thee, many Defects which attend thee daily in all thou doest.

Does the divine Commandment extend to every Duty? who is there of us then can say, there has ever a Day passed him, wherein he has not been guilty of some sinful Omission or other? Have you got all the good you might, by hearing, or reading, the Word of GOD, by Conferences, and Meditation, and Prayer? Or have you done all the good you could unto others; to their Bodies, and to their Souls, by your charitable Assistance, by your Exhortations, Admonitions, and Counsels? Nay, if we thoroughly search our Ways, may we not find, that there is

(a) *Eccl. vii. 20.* (b) *1 Joh. i. 8.*

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not a Day we have lived which has been wholly free from the Commission of many Evils, which were in our Power to have prevented ; Can we say, that our Carriage to GOD, and to our Fellow Creature, has been with that Reverence, and Devotion, with that Exactness, Circumspection, and Goodness, which it might, and ought to have been ? Or, have we suffered no evil Communication to proceed out of our Mouths, no Words that have been hasty, and rash, indecent, or censorious, or that favoured too much of Levity, and Profaneness ? Or, have our Hearts been in suitable Frames all the Day long ? Has there been no Degree of forbidden Anger, Malice, Hatred, or Revenge, lurking there ? Or, has there been no Lust of Concupiscence, Covetousness, or Pride, harboured there ? Have we suffered no vain Thoughts to lodge within us ? It is to be feared that there is a great Deal of Guilt chargeable upon every one of us, upon these Accounts.

Besides ; it must be remembred, that as the Commandment reaches to the Heart, so it Means to govern us in our Principles, and Ends, and the Manner of our performing of our Duty, as well as in the Matter of it. Possibly, there may be many, who pass for good People, that have no Regard to the Principle, and End, of their Actions, nor to the Manner of their Performance of their Duty, any further than the external Form ; and so they do but attend to the doing of the Thing required of them, as to the Matter of it, they are easy, and contented, and look no further. But, say now, does not the Commandment require us to do all that we do with a sincere *aim to the*
Glory

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Glory of GOD (c) ? Does not the Commandment, require us to Worship GOD in Spirit, and in Truth, (d) and to seek him, and keep his Precepts, with our whole Heart ? Well then ; do we find, upon Examination, that, even in the Religious Duties we have been imployed about, we have always come up to what the Commandment requireth of us, and sincerely aimed at the Glory of GOD, and the shewing forth our Makers Praise ? Has our whole Heart been engaged therein, and have they always been performed by us with that Life, and Vigor, that Spirituality, and Purity, of Mind, that Delight, and Satisfaction of Soul, which the Rule demands of us ? Or, are we not often carnal, cold, dull, slothful, and perfunctory, in our very Acts of Devotion, or backward to them, or soon weary of them ? Have we allowed no evil Thoughts, no Stirring and Workings of Corruption in us, while we have been praying, reading, or hearing the Word of GOD ? Have no worldly Views, and Concerns, crowded into our Minds, and been tolerated there, while we have been attending upon the holy Supper of our Lord, one of the sacred Rites of our holy Religion ? Has no Temptation taken hold of us, and influenced us in our Duties ; no sinister and worldly Principles, of making a Gain of Godliness ; no carnal Ends, of being seen of Men, of pleasing our Superiors, and of being applauded, ever been proposed by us in our religious Performances ? And if we have been Defective in our holy things, how many more, may we well suppose, have been the Errors we have committed, in the common Affairs of Life,

(c) 1. Cor. x. 31. (d) Job. iv. 24. Ps. cxix. 2, and 69.

where

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where we are most off from our Guard, and are apt to be less critical and exact in our observing the Rule ? Alas ! *Who can say, I have made my Heart clean, I am pure from my Sin (e) ?*

O ! how hard and difficult do the very best of us find it, to live in such a constant conscientious Obedience to the Divine Commandment, as the Rule requires, without allowing ourselves, at any Time, in the Neglect of any known Duty, or committing any wilful Error in our Conduct ? The constant keeping of our End in our Eye, and the diligent Application of ourselves to our Master's Business, without any such Remissness as will bring us under the Character of the slothful Servant ; the perpetual striving against the corrupt Bent, and Inclination, of our own depraved Hearts, and the prevailing Force of the vicious Customs of the Place, and Age, we live in and the powerful Suggestions of a busy and malicious Devil ; and the keeping of our Hearts true to GOD ; and steadfast in his Covenant, amidst all the Snares and Temptations that surround us ; are much more hard and difficult Things, than many carnal Professors imagine ; who are ready to conclude, that an open Profession of Religion, and a Round of external Duties, are sufficient to denominate a Man a good Christian, and entitle him unto the Favour of GOD. Alas ; *there are many that seek, who shall not be able to enter into the Kingdom of GOD, as our blessed Lord informs us (f) ;* because it is a much more laborious Task than they imagine to be universally obedient ; and they will not be at the Pains with themselves, to strive

(e) *Prov.* xx. 9. (f) *Luk.* xiii. 24.

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for the Mastery over every Corruption, and subdue every Lust, and perform all that they do in Singleness of Heart unto the Lord, with those holy Views, and in that spiritual Manner which the Commandment prescribes. How exceeding difficult is it, for a Man to preserve himself Steady in his Obedience unto his GOD, when he is perpetually in danger, from his Company, his Business, his natural Temper and Constitution, of being turned aside from the holy Commandment ? “ How hard a Matter is it, “ (said the excellent Dr. Tillotson †,) to be “ much in Company, and free in Conversation, “ and not to be infected by it ? to live “ in the midst of a wicked World, and yet to “ keep ourselves free from the Vices of it ? And “ then how hard is it to be chearful, without “ being vain ? and grave and serious, without “ being morose ? How difficult is it to have a “ Mind equal to every Condition, and to be content with mean and moderate Things ? to be “ patient in Adversity, and humble in Prosperity, and meek upon sudden and violent Provocations ? So that we may sadly conclude, that the best of Men have their Weaknesses and Imperfections, and come greatly short of that Exactness, which is necessary to render their Hearts and Action conformable to the Rule.

But, perhaps, some will be ready to say, why these are but small Faults, meer Peccadilloes which GOD will not be so severe as to mark against us, and we doubt not but he will overlook such small Failings in us, seeing that, in the Main, we endeavour to be obedient to his Commandment. But why should you imagine that GOD will over-look them ? Is your

† *Vol. ii. p. 262.*

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Obedience perfect, while it has so many Defects in it ? and does not the Law insist upon a perfect Obedience ? But GOD is merciful, (you say,) and, from the Goodness of his Nature, will readily pass by and forgive small Faults. Why, truly the Goodness of his Nature is sufficiently manifested, in making of thee a rational Agent, and not a Brute, and in giving to thee an holy, just, and good Law, in supporting of thee in Being, and continuing the Use of thy Reason to thee, and in so long waiting upon thee to be gracious to thee. But is not GOD just, as well as good ? and shall there be no Room for the Manifestation of his Justice but in the more atrocious Crimes ? Must the Goodness of GOD clash with his Holiness, and Justice, to give thee an Opportunity to sin with Impunity ? And is not the least Departure from the Commandment a Sin ? And will the holy GOD tolerate it, and the just GOD forbear to punish for it ? The very Plea shews, that there has been a Defect, in your Obedience, which needs a Pardon ; and that shews, that you have deserved to suffer. So *the Scripture (the Law) concludes all* (all Men, and all that they can do,) *under Sin* (g) : *for whatsoever the Law saith, it saith unto them that are under the Law, that every Mouth may be stopped, and all the World may be guilty before GOD* (h).

Yea, so exceeding broad is the divine Commandment that we cannot possibly reach to the utmost Extent of it, in our present imperfect State. Though we ought to press after the highest Attainments in Grace and Holiness, yet when we have arrived at the utmost Degrees it is possible for us, now, to reach unto, while

(g) *Gal.* iii. 22. (h) *Rom.* iii. 19.

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we are cloathed with Flesh, and attended with our sinful Infirmities, there will still remain farther Degrees for us to labour after. Therefore the holiest of Men are commanded, *(i)* to grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. So that if we bring ourselves, and all our Actions, to the Rule, we may plainly see that we come vastly short of that Exactness which is our Duty, even in the very best that we do ; and it is just Matter of Humiliation to us, that we are so very defective in all, that if GOD should enter into Judgment with us, and mark our Iniquity against us, we could not answer him for one of a Thousand ; and it concerns us daily to renew our Repentance, because we daily offend.

What a Wonder of Mercy, then, is it, that the infinitely holy GOD will be pleased to accept of any of our imperfect Services ? Truly, we serve the best of Masters ; whose Mercy reaches us in our poor low infirm State, and pities us under all our Weaknesses, helps us under all our Infirmities, and accepteth of our sincere Desires, and Endeavours, after perfect Obedience, though there are innumerable Defects in us, and our Services, when we have done our best. We are beholden to a merciful GOD for every good Thing wrought in us, or done by us. * *Who maketh thee to differ from another Man ? and what hast thou which thou didst not receive ?* Thy very Faith, and Repentance, and every Grace in thee, is the Gift of GOD to thee, without whom thou couldest do nothing. GOD oweth thee Nothing, but Thou owest thy Self, and all that thou canst do, to him : it is but thy due Debt

(i) 2 Pet. iii. 18. * 1 Cor. iv. 7.

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to serve him, in the most exact, and steady, uninterrupted, Obedience to his Commands ; a Debt which thou art to be always paying, and yet canst never fully pay ; a Debt which thou comest so short in, that, when thou hast done all thou canst, thou wilt have no Room to boast and glory, as if thou deservedst any Thing, but must rely upon the infinite Mercy of GOD to accept thy poor Performances. *We are all an unclean Thing, and all our Righteousnesses are but as filthy Rags ;* said the Prophet †. That after a Man has lived the most holy circumspect Life, that ever any mere Man in the World did, after all his fervent Prayers, and Devotions, and penitent Tears and Humiliations, and exemplary Probity, Justice, and Charity, if the great and holy GOD should deal with him according to the strict Demands of his holy Law and Commandment, he would be sent down to Hell, as the just Reward of the Iniquity of his holy Things. But by Grace ye are saved ; and the Grace of GOD is superabundant towards us, in accepting, and rewarding of our Obedience, which, after all, is so very defective.

Certainly then, in vain do any expect Justification by any Performances of their own ; for *by the Deeds of the Law no Flesh shall be justified in his Sight (k.)* We are, after we have done our best, not only unprofitable Servants, but, so very defective, that we should not be able to stand a Trial before our Judge, and hold up our Heads in the great Day of Account. This therefore shews us what Reason we have to repair to the pardoning Mercy of GOD, through the Merits of JESUS CHRIST, that our Sins may be forgiven, and we may be accepted into

† *Isa.* lxiv. 6. (k) *Rom.* iii. 25.

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His Favour. If the Commandment be so exceeding broad, as we have seen, then we need a more perfect Righteousness than any we are able to procure by our own Obedience, to justify us before GOD, and entitle us to the divine Acceptance. For, how can we imagine that GOD, who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity, will accept our imperfect Services, as they are in themselves, without any farther Considerations? Verily, the Justice, and Holiness of GOD will not admit of it. The holy, and righteous, wise, and good GOD can look upon no Righteousness, as sufficient to recommend any to his Favour, but what is every Way adequate, and correspondent to the Demand of his Law; the want of this is a Trespas upon his Authority, and Dominion, which was the Case of Apostate Angels, and fallen Man; and therefore, since, through the Defectiveness of our Obedience, we are not Owners of such a perfect Righteousness of our own, 'tis necessary that we be provided of such a sinless Righteousness from an other, as our Surety, in the Vertue of which GOD may accept us, and our Services, and confer the Blessing upon us. GOD smelleth a sweet Savour only in a perfect spotless Sacrifice. All of which shews us the Necessity there is of our being found in the Righteousness of JESUS CHRIST, our only Mediator, in the Merits of whose Sufferings GOD will graciously pardon all our Sins, and in the Vertue of whose perfect Obedience he will accept of our sincere, though imperfect Services, according to the Tenor of the Grace of the Gospel; and consequently the Necessity of our Faith in the Lord JESUS CHRIST, relying upon his infinite Merits alone for our Justification

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tification before GOD, that being justified by Faith, through the Imputation of the Righteousness of CHRIST unto us, we may have Peace with GOD, and be accepted to his everlasting Mercy. For, blessed be GOD ; if any Man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, JESUS CHRIST the righteous ; who is a Propitiation for our Sin (l). If there had been a Law given which would have given Life, verily Righteousness should have been by the Law (m) : But what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the Flesh, GOD sending his own Son, in the Likeness of sinful Flesh, and for Sin condemned Sin in the Flesh ; that the Righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit (n) : whom (JESUS CHRIST) GOD hath set forth to be a Propitiation, through Faith in his Blood, to declare his Righteousness for the Remission of Sins that are past ; through the Forbearance of GOD ;---that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in JESUS (o). Our only Hope, and Plea, then, is the prevailing Merits of his Obedience, and Sufferings, who gave Himself for us, that He might wash away our Sins in his own Blood (p). And need have we to renew our Closure with the Lord JESUS CHRIST, by a daily fresh Exercise of our Faith in Him, in the Virtue and Efficacy of his Obedience and Passion, that we may have our imperfect Services, perfumed with His sweet Incense, and, presented through His Hands, rendered acceptable to His eternal Father ; and

(l) 1 Joh. ii. 1, 2.
Rom. viii. 3, 4.
Rev. i. 5.

(m) Gal. iii. 21. (n)
(o) Rom. iii. 25, 26. (p)

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that we may obtain the Forgiveness of all our Sins, and short Comings in Duty, and may be received unto that eternal Life, which CHRIST has purchased, and GOD, that cannot lie, has promised before the World began.



SERMON



S E R M O N IX.

P S A L M CXIX. 96.

I have seen an End of all Perfection ; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

I Am yet upon the Improvement of the second Doctrine from these Words ; and I have inferred,

1. The wonderful Goodness, Mercy, and Compassion, of GOD to a miserable World, in making a clear Revelation of his Mind and Will to it.

2. The indispenfible Obligations we all lie under to keep the Commandment of GOD.

3. That pure Religion is our trueft Wisdom ; because it meaneth to better us in our Persons, and all our Relations, and render us comfortable here, and compleatly happy hereafter ; and it requires nothing unreasonable of us, or that we shall have Cause to be ashamed or repent of ; and if at last we should be deceived in our Expectations of future Happiness, (which

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(which the truly religious Man shall not be,) yet we shall have acted the wisest Part, in living as becometh our rational Nature, and guarding against the greatest future Evil.

4. The very great Evil of Persons making light of, and contemning, the divine Commandment, by playing their prophane Jest, and Banter upon it, turning it into Drollery and Ridicule; or by forming new Notions, and Schemes of Religion, unwarranted by the divine Oracles; or by neglecting to attend upon it.

5. How short we all come of the Rule in our Obedience, and what need the Best have to be humble, and implore the pardoning Mercy of GOD, through the Merits of CHRIST, that we may find Acceptance.

I shall mention two or three other Inferences, and then conclude this Subject with a Use of Exhortation.

6. Hence we may infer, that the Office of the Gospel Ministry, is attended with very great Labour and Difficulty, as well as is truly honourable. JESUS CHRIST hath appointed the sacred Order of the Ministry, not for a temporary but a standing Office, in his Church, to the End of the World; and therefore he said to his first Ministers, in the latter End of *Matthew's Gospel*, *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the End of the World*: and the great Work, and Business, of this Order of Men are, the *Work of the Ministry*, the converting of Sinners from the Error of their Ways, the *perfecting of the Saints*, and so the edifying of the Body of CHRIST; to which End the Word of Reconciliation it committed

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mitted unto them, that they should preach the unfearchable Riches of CHRIST. Now, if the Commandment is exceeding broad, if there is a transcendent Excellency in it, as it is the Word of the Great GOD, the Law of the eternal King, and it's great Design is to perfect our Nature, and compleat our Happiness ? then certainly, those whom GOD employs to dispence his Word to us, who explain to us, and enforce upon us, the Will of GOD, whose Business it is to conduct us in the Paths of Righteousness, and shew to us the Way of Salvation, these surely are fixed in an high and honourable Station. Shall the Care of our worldly Interest, the defending us from the Injuries and Oppressions of the voracious, and the Recovery of our Rights, when they are unjustly detained, or violently taken away from us, be thought to confer Honour upon him that pleads, or Umpires, our Cause ? Or shall the Care of our Bodies, and the securing them from the Maladies they are liable unto, and the restoring them to Health and Vigour, when they are weakened and impaired, be thought to render him honourable that prudently administers to them ? And shall not the Care of our Souls, the promoting their Health and Vigour, and the securing their present Comfort, and their eternal Interest, confer as great an Honour upon those whose peculiar Business it is to lay themselves out in Study for us, and are constantly, and faithfully, spending their Time, and Strength in warning, counselling, and instructing of us ? Yea, shall the Care of the external Affairs of Mankind, the Government of their outward Conduct, and Behaviour, to one another, by proper Laws, and the enforcing Obedience to those
Laws

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Laws of the State, be thought to confer an high Honour from those that wear the Commission from an earthly Monarch ? And are they, at the same Time, in a low and despicable Post, who are commissioned from the great, the eternal, King, to take Care of the Government of Mankind, by instilling the best Principles into them, by teaching them the best Manners, and have Power to enforce the Laws of the Kingdom of Heaven, upon it's Subjects, by an Authorative Declaration of it's Promises, and Denunciation of its Threatnings, and ministerially to execute the sacred Discipline upon the bold and incorrigible Offender ? Is not the Welfare of our Souls greatly to be preferred to that of our Bodies ? Is not their eternal Happiness beyond any temporal Felicity the Body can enjoy ? And does not this argue, that their Office, whose Business it is to promote their Welfare, their Rectitude and Happiness, is of a far more noble and excellent a Nature, than any that relates to the Concerns of the Body, and the present Life only, can be ? Or is their Office more honourable, and their Persons only more contemptible ? *Now then we are Embassadors for CHRIST, as though GOD did beseech you by us, we pray you, in CHRIST stead, be ye reconciled unto GOD ;* this is the Language of the Apostle concerning the Ministers of the Gospel (q) : and how strongly does it argue the Honour that is due unto them ? Truly, I have often wondred at it, that any, who wear the Character of Gentlemen, should act so mean and low a Part, as to pour their Contempt upon the sacred Order and Office, upon which even the Temporal Welfare of

(q) 2 Cor. v. 20.

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humane Society is so much dependent, while at the same Time, we see them pay the highest Court to Offices of vastly less Importance: But our blessed Lord has said, (r) *My Kingdom is not of this World.*

Though, we magnify our Office, yet, we do not mean, by this, that great swelling Titles of Honour, and worldly Grandeur is to be heaped upon us; no, these are contemptible, and mean, compared with our high Office; nor mean we to lord it over GOD's Heritage, no, *we preach not ourselves, but CHRIST JESUS the Lord; and ourselves your Servants for JESUS Sake* (s); but then give us leave to hope that you will so far honour our Office, and our Persons, while we are faithful in it, as to preserve such an inward Respect, and Reverence, thereto, as may afford us the Opportunity to do you all the Good we wish to do, and may best answer the great Ends of our Ministry; that you may hearken to our Instruction, receive our Counsel, and submit to our teaching and Government, and *esteem us highly, in Love, for our Work's Sake*; for thus the Apostle of our Lord hath said, (t) *Obey them that have the Rule over you, and submit your selves; for they watch for your Souls, as they that must give Account, that they may do it with Joy and not with Grief; for that is unprofitable for you.* The Ministers of the Lord come unto you in his Name, vested with Authority from him, and declare what his Will and Pleasure concerning you is, and therefore it is your Part to regard them, as Messengers of GOD; though if they speak not according to their Instructions,

(r) *Joh.* xviii. 36. (s) *2 Cor.* iv. 5. (t) *Heb.* xiii. 17.

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hear them not ; there will be no Danger in such Disobedience. The Keys of the Kingdom of GOD, and his MESSIAH, are committed to them, those they regularly bind on Earth, shall be bound in Heaven, those they regularly loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven ; the Sentence they pass, according to the Law of GOD, will be ratified and confirmed by their great Master : and it is no Presumption in them, in the Discharge of their Office, to reprove the greatest, and haughtiest, Transgressor, and warn him of the Evil of his Ways, and administer the holy Discipline of the Kingdom of CHRIST upon him, and let such know, that their Sovereign Master will severely punish all that impenitently go on in Disobedience to any of his known Commands : and whilst they keep within their proper Line, and faithfully do the Duties of their Office, they that affront, insult, and injure them, affront the King of Heaven himself, whose Ministers they are ; and hence we may observe our Saviour publishing to all the World, how he will resent the Treatment of his Ministers, saying, *(u) He that beareth you, beareth me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.*

But then, as it shews the Dignity, and Authority, of the Ministers of the Gospel of CHRIST, so does it also bespeak the very great Labour, and Difficulty, that attends their sacred Office. They are, in a qualified Sense, the Keepers of the divine Law, entrusted with that sacred *Depositum*, and to explain and enforce the divine Commandment upon their Fellow Creatures, and, in this Way, to train them up, and fit them, for the

(u) Luk. x. 16.

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future Happiness, the unutterable Rewards of the Kingdom of GOD. And though, one would be ready to think, that, it should require no very great Labour, and Pains, to persuade Men to be happy, because every Man naturally thirsteth after Happiness, yet, so it is, that it is one of the most operose, and laborious Tasks that can be; because we have the Weaknesses, and Mistakes, and Prejudices, the Lusts and Passions of Men to encounter withal. 'Tis true, Men would be happy, if they might; but it must be in their own Way. If they might but get to Heaven, and enjoy all the Happiness they are capable of, at last, and yet indulge their several vicious Appetites, and walk in the Ways of their own Heart, for the present, and be obliged to no Acts of Self Denial, they might easily be persuaded to this; because this would suit well with their corrupt Inclination, their depraved Taste, and mistaken Notion of things: but to persuade them to be happy, in GOD's Way, the only Way in which they can be happy, this is an exceeding great Difficulty; because their Prejudices are levelled against this as an uneasy and burdensome thing to them, and their various Lusts draw them another Way, and their Mistakes persuade them that they may be as truly happy in a Way of their own choosing. And hence there needs a great deal of Pains to convince Men, that they are mistaken in their Notions of Happiness; that, as fond as they are of it, they are vainly seeking for it where it is not to be found, and that they must certainly take another Course, than they do, if ever they would be happy. Here we have the carnal Interests of Men, which bias and warp their Minds, to conflict withal; and it is no easy Matter to draw them off from those Prejudices,
and

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and convince them, that their true and main Interest does not lie in this World, neither is their Happiness to be enjoyed here ; that there is an End of all created Perfection, and that they need something beyond the Riches, and Pleasures, and Honours, of this World, to make them truly happy. It is very hard to beat Men off from their strong Attachment to the Objects of Sense.

Besides, we must let Men know, that they must be better Men, or they cannot be happy ; that they must rectify the Disorders of their Minds, subdue and mortify their irregular Appetites, and carefully avoid every thing that is mean and base, that is impious and unjust, and constantly practise all the Vertues of a sober, a righteous, and a godly Life, and Conversation : and this engages us in a Struggle with the Lusts and Passions of Men, which are no real Friends to Vertue. And because these Lusts and Passions are ordinarily very strong and active, through a long Course of indulging them, therefore it is so much the more Difficult for us to overcome them : so that there needs a great Deal of Study and Thought, Caution and Guard, Prudence and Watchfulness, and a diligent Application, to be able to come
 ‘ at the right Side of Men, and find out accep-
 ‘ table Words, that may reach them, and yet
 ‘ please them ; that may suit their Case, and
 ‘ yet not be offensive to them ; that may strike
 ‘ home upon their Consciences ; and not stir
 ‘ their Wrath ; that in all we may be faithful to
 GOD, and faithful to the Souls of our Neigh-
 bours, and yet, if possible, not provoke them to
 disrelish our Ministry. So that we must be *made*
all things to all Men, that we might by all Means
save some (w). And after all our Study, and

(w) 1 Cor. ix. 22.

Watchfulness,

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Watchfulness, and Diligence, and Prudence there is requisite our fervent and unwearied Prayers to the GOD of all Grace, for the Presence and Assistance of the divine Spirit to accompany our Ministry, and succeed our Labours ; without which, *who is sufficient for these things* (x) ? If the holy and omnipotent Spirit of GOD do not accompany our Ministry, we may be heard, but we shall not be regarded ; we may be unto our Hearers, as *Ezekiel* was to his, as a *very lovely Song, of one that bath a pleasant Voice, and can play well on an Instrument*, but our Word shall not be obeyed ; the Sinner will still go on in his vicious Courses, and, under the Influences of a vain Dream of Happiness, pass down to eternal Misery, in Spite of all that we can do to prevent it.

And this produces an other very great Difficulty in our Work, namely, the Discouragement we meet with, because our Message is not regarded, our Master is slighted, and all his gracious Offers are contemned, and Men are such Fools as to neglect Heaven, and Happiness, upon the fairest Offers imaginable, and all for the Sake of a vain World, and sordid Lusts ; so that we have often Cause sadly to lament, with the Prophet, *the Bellows are burnt, the Lead is consumed of the Fire, the Founder melteth in vain ; for the Wicked are not plucked away ; we labour in vain, and spend our Strength for nought ; and to cry out with the Apostles, Lord, we have toiled all Night, and all Day too and have caught nothing.* And what Uneasiness must this be to us ? How does it stir all our Compassion and Sorrow ? to see those we live amongst, and converse with, whom we have

(x) 2 Cor. ii. 16.

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contracted a Friendship for, and are become dear to us, as our peculiar Charge, living in Defiance with our great Master, trampling upon his holy Laws, and pulling down his amazing Vengeance upon them, and all we can do for them will not save them from endless Ruin ? Our Hearts must be hard as the Nether Mil-stone not to feel the very forcible Impressions of Pity and Compassion, mixed with a killing Grief and Sorrow, at such a lamentable Sight as this.

Nor are we without our Difficulties, arising from ourselves. We are of the same Nature, and of like Passions, with other Men, are equally liable unto Temptations, and more so : and it requires no less Care and Pains to furnish ourselves for our Work, that we may *be able Ministers of the New Testament, rightly dividing the Word of Truth*, that we may have a thorough Knowledge of the divine Commandment, and may be able to teach others ; and when we have spent our Time, in Study, and Prayer, how watchful must we be ? that we bring no unhallowed Fire to GOD's Altar, that we feed you with the wholesome Food of the Word of GOD, that Bread of Life which our Master has ordered for his Family, and not put you off with Chaff, or teach for Doctrine the Commandments of Men. It is no little Difficulty to approve ourselves faithful Stewards in the House of GOD ; and, considering the Tempers and Humors of Mankind, to overcome our Fears of offending those that look upon themselves as great Men, or lest we lose the Favour and Friendship of those from whom, it may be, a considerable Part of our scanty Allowance comes, for our being true to our Trust, and faithful in the Discharge of our Office ;

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Office ; and yet we are under the strongest Obligations, as we will answer it to our Lord and Master, to be faithful, in warning every Man, and bearing our Testimony against every Vice, and when we spie Danger, to lift up our Voice like a Trumpet, and cry aloud, and shew our People their Iniquity, that, if possible, we may keep ourselves free from the Blood of all Men, and save our own Souls, and the Souls of them that hear us. These are some of the Labours, and Difficulties, of those who are employed in the Service of the Ministry, whose Business it is to teach the Law of the Lord ; and we may be sure that the grand Adversary, whose Kingdom they oppose, will not fail to give them Disturbance enough : and we see that the more honourable their Work is, so much the more laborious, and serviceable, it is also ; and Reason there is for our addressing of you, in the Strain of the Apostle, *Now I beseech you, Brethren, for the Lord JESUS CHRIST sake, and for the Love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me, in your Prayers to GOD for me* (x).

Hence we learn, what is, and will be, the miserable Condition of all such as live, and die, in Disobedience to the divine Commandment. For if it is the Commandment of the great GOD, and aims at our Comfort, and Happiness, then those that live in Disobedience thereto must of Consequence greatly provoke the divine Majesty, and deprive themselves of their own Comfort and Happiness ; and this is to be truly miserable. For what is it to live in Disobedience to the Commands of GOD ? but to rise up in Rebellion against him, to deny his rightful Authority over us, to joyn in Confederacy with his avowed

(x) *Rom. xv. 30.*

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Adversary, and conspire the dethroning of him from his Dominion : so that a Life of Disobedience is no other than a vile Insult upon his Government, and, as *Job* expresses it, (y) *a denying the GOD that is above* : it is to set up a mean and low Pretender, a vile Usurper, in his Stead, as Lord over us, and pay that Homage to Self, and Satan, which is due unto GOD only. And what can argue a meaner Thought of the all-perfect, and infinitely glorious GOD, the Greatest, and the Best, of Beings, than thus to set up the vilest and worst of Beings in Opposition to him ? And what can give a higher Provocation to the divine Majesty, than not only to do all we can to strip him of his Authority, but, to give the Preference to such as are most detestable ? Yet this prodigious Guilt and Folly is justly chargeable upon all such as live in a continued Course of Disobedience to any of the known Laws of GOD ; who live in the Neglect of the religious Worship of GOD, either social, or solitary ; who take his Name in vain, and profane his holy Day ; who are stubborn and rebellious in their Carriage to their Superiours, or insulting and tyrannical over their Inferiours, or malicious and revengful to their Equals ; who live in Falshood and Unrighteousness, in Intemperance and Incontinency, and the like ; by such open, bold, and daring Transgressions they pour the greatest Contempt upon their sovereign Lawgiver, and provoke him to his Face : which made the Apostle say, (z) *through breaking the Law dishonourest thou GOD*. It is not only true of the Heathen World, that, though they know GOD, by his Works, yet they glorify him not as GOD, by living up to the Dictates of natural Conscience, which is the

(y) *Job. xxxi. 28.* (z) *Rom. ii. 23.*

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Commandment, or Law, written on their Hearts ; but it is to be feared, that there are many among professed Christians, who, notwithstanding the Advantages they enjoy, in the clearer Revelation of the divine Will, and though they appear openly to own that Revelation to be from GOD, and pretend to take it for the Rule of their Lives, yet, in their Practice, *say unto GOD, depart from us, we desire not the Knowledge of thy Ways : what is the Almighty that we should serve him ? and what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him (a) ?*

But is the Commandment exceeding broad, as we have seen, then certainly those who so reproach their Maker, by a wilful Disobedience to his holy Laws, must unavoidably be in a miserable State and Condition : and indeed they evidently carry about with them, daily, so great a Part of their Misery, as is sufficient, one would think, to make them cry out in the Strain of the *Apostle, (b) O wretched Man that I am ; who shall deliver me ?* For it is very apparent, that they, who so contemn the Authority of GOD, and go on in a Course of Disobedience to his holy Commandment, are under the Power of diverse Lusts, and Passions, being *sold under Sin*. For, what but a strong Prejudice upon the Mind, (against the Commandment of GOD, which is the Result of the highest Reason, and Goodness,) arising from the powerful Influence of some Lust or other, could prevail with a reasonable Creature to live in a direct Contrariety to the Authority of his rightful Sovereign, and in Disobedience to those Commands which are every Way calculated to promote his real Benefit, both in this World, and the next ? For, the Man cannot but acknow-

(a) *Job.* xxi. 14, 15. (b) *Rom.* vii. 24.

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ledge, if there be a GOD, (and this is the Language of all Nature about him,) that then this GOD is his Sovereign Lord, and has a Right to be obeyed in whatever he commandeth, and that it must needs be for his Interest to resign up his own Will entirely to the divine Will, and govern himself, in all things, by the divine Law: because this his almighty Sovereign is able fully to reward all his Services, and severely to punish him for his Disobedience; and that therefore it must be an unreasonable thing in him to obey and serve some Lust or other, rather than the living GOD. Nay do we not find the Generality of profligate and vicious Livers, in their cool Thoughts, acknowledging the Equity and Goodness of the Law it self; and yet they act directly contrary to it? like him, who could say, *Videa meliora proboq; deteriora sequar*: or, in the Apostle's Stile, *I consent unto the Law that it is good, but do that which I would not, Evil being present with me* (c). And whence is this but from the prevailing Power of Prejudice enslaving of them? What can be a greater Infelicity, than, for an intelligent Mind, capable of discerning right, to be in vile Subjection to some base and fordid Lust or Passion, and ever be led wrong by them? What can be worse, than to be under the Power and lordly Dominion of Irregularity and Disorder? to be ever erring from the Way of Truth, and Peace? Is there any thing more unbecoming a rational Creature, than to be a Slave to Sense; or, than for an heaven-born Soul to be the Devil's Drudge? Can there be a greater Unhappiness, than for a rational Agent to be continually acting contrary to his Light and Knowledge, and be perpetually ex-

(c) *Rom. vii. 16-18.*

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posing himself to the Réproaches of his own Heart ? Does he need any other Torment, who carries that within him, which challenges his Actions, accuses him for his Impiety, and lashes him for his extream Folly and Madnes ? What is there can make such a Man easy and comfortable, while he feels the stinging Reflections of his own Mind ? 'Tis true, indeed, that a Man may very much stifle and suppress the Remonstrances of his own Mind, by the Hurry, and Noise, and Diversions, of the World ; but can he always command Silence in his own Breast, and stop the just Clamours of Conscience against himself ? No verily ; sometimes it will cry aloud, and will be heard, in Spite of all that he can do to prevent it ; and when once the Heighth of his Noisy Mirth is over, and the Heat of Wine and strong Drink hath spent itself, and he begins to be a little cool, and retire within himself, and think sedately, what an Uproar is there raised in his Soul ? what a Storm rages in his Breast ? What Convulsions seize him ? which he cannot, for a while at least, get rid of, nor knows he how to support himself under. (c) *The Spirit of a Man will sustain his Infirmities, the ordinary Calamities of Life, but a wounded Spirit who can bear ?* Who indeed ! Certainly, this is the very Misery of Devils themselves ; to be unable to act up to the Dignity of their rational Nature, and to feel the Smart of their own Réproaches for it. Yet so miserable are all they who are under the Power of Lust and Prejudice, and turn their Backs upon the holy Commandment. And though, through the Defilement, and Stupidity, of their Consciences, they may not, for the present, feel the Sting, and be sensible of

(c) *Prov. xviii. 14.*

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their unhappy Condition, yet the Time will come when their Sorrows shall compass them about, as with a Chain, and the pointed Arrows of the Almighty shall drench up their Spirits within them.

If ever such irreligious and disobedient Creatures should come to a serious Temper, and wisely consider their present State, and their latter End, before it is too late, they will then know what is meant by the Conviction of Sin and Guilt ; and the Sense of their having made GOD to become their Enemy, and of having affronted their own Minds, by their acting contrary to the Dictates of right Reason, in their Disobedience to the divine Commands, will give such a Wound and Sting to their Souls, as will not easily be cured, and can hardly be endured.

But if the poor thoughtless Creatures should go on in their Contempt of the divine Authority, and carry their rebellious Principles out of this World with them, they will forever regret their Madness, when they shall find themselves everlastingly separated from the least Glimpse of all that Happiness, which the divine Commandment would have led them to ; and, in Lieu thereof, shall inherit the contrary Misery, in having their awakened Apprehensions, with exquisite Sensation, forever weltering under the heavy Impressions of the divine Wrath and Indignation. *For the Wrath of GOD is revealed from Heaven, against all Ungodliness, and Unrighteousness of Men (d) : and GOD will render Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish, upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile (e) : There is, in-*

(d) *Rom. i. 18.* (e) *Rom. ii. 6, 9.*

deed;

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deed, a very great Infelicity that hardened Sinners are liable unto, through the Wrath of GOD, in the present World, namely, that all the Creatures of GOD are in a State of Enmity with them. For by making GOD, whom they rebel against, to become their Enemy, they unavoidably render all the Creatures of GOD, who are his Servants, the Ministers of his Pleasure, to be at Enmity with them also : so that they all stand ready, whenever their Master shall say the Word, to execute the divine Vengeance upon them, in such a Manner as shall greatly embitter their present Life to them with various and amazing Sorrows ; nor have they any Security against being soon brought into the most uncomfortable Circumstances that can possibly attend any in this World, nor any Method, if such a wretched Condition should overtake them, to get rid of it, or to enjoy themselves with any tolerable Satisfaction in it. But however, it is impossible, whatever be his present Sensations, for the disobedient Soul to be otherwise than compleatly miserable, in the future World. There Disorder and Peace, Guilt and Comfort, cannot possibly dwell together. Then every Transgression, and Disobedience, will receive a just Recompence of Reward, from a provoked Sovereign and Judge ; and the bold Contemners of the divine Authority, who have *bated Instruction, and cast the Word of GOD behind their Backs ;*----(however GOD may seem to keep Silence for the present, as if he regarded not their Behaviour,) ----- *He will certainly reprove, and set their Sin in Order before them ;* ---- *He will tear them to Pieces, and there shall be none to deliver* (f). For, the future World

(f) *Psal.* l. 17, 21, 22.

will

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will be the Time, and Place, of Retribution and Rewards, when every Man shall receive according to what he hath done in the Body : and because their Judge perfectly knows all the Crimes they have been guilty of, and wants neither Purity to resent them as they deserve, nor Power to punish for them, and everlives to see the threatened Sentence executed upon them, therefore the Condition of the obstinately disobedient Sinner will be miserable indeed. It will include the Heighth of Misery in it, and be utterly unavoidable. It will include in it the utmost Degrees of Misery the Sinner is capable of enduring, because it will be the Effect of the righteous Displeasure, the heated Indignation, of an infinitely holy and powerful GOD, the Power of whose Wrath as much exceeds our Fears, as the Riches of his Grace does our most enlarged Hopes ; the Weight of whose Arm will fall heavy, in the Day when he executeth Vengeance upon the bold Transgressors of his Law. And who then shall be able to endure it ! And if that Misery be inconceivably great which results from the fierce Wrath of an Almighty GOD, how amazing will it be, when we add the Consideration of it's eternal Duration to the Weight of it ! *That they shall be punished with everlasting Destruction, from the Presence of the Lord, and the Glory of his Power, who know not GOD, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord JESUS CHRIST (g) !* In a Word ; it will be beyond the Sinner's Reach to escape this Misery ; because GOD can find him out in his most secret lurking Places, and neither the Strength of his own Arm, nor the Wisdom of his Heart, can deliver him, nor will any Creature avail him, to

(g) 2 *Thess.* i. 8, 9.

afford

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afford him Help against the prodigious Destruction that will overtake him, in that Day of the Lord's Anger. Nothing but divine infinite Mercy could rescue the guilty obstinate Sinner from everlasting Burning, but this Mercy he utterly flights and abuses, by his continuing in Disobedience to the divine Commandment, after all the Calls and gracious Invitations, made to him to turn and live; and now, *how shall he escape, seeing he neglects so great Salvation (b) ?*

I will just add one Inference more, *viz.*

8. This teaches us, that we should not content ourselves with the bare Letter of the Commandment. The Commandment, or Revelation from GOD, is designed to produce a spiritual Life, and Power, in our Souls, and so to make us truly and thorowly Good; and therefore we should not satisfy our selves, that we know the Letter of the Commandment, or that we practise according to the Letter of it, in an Observation of the external Duties required of us; but we should endeavour to feel the Force of it on our Hearts, that it may quicken us, and inspire us with a new, and divine Principle, and influence us to spiritual Devotion, and real Holiness, and so make us alive unto GOD. 'Tis not enough that we study the Scriptures, as Men do other Sciences, to inform our Minds, and furnish us for Discourse, to enlarge our Speculations, and increase our Ideas and Notions of Things, without having any Regard to Practice; but the Word must be ingrafted in us, that our Fruit may partake of its Virtue, and we must endeavour to reduce our Knowledge to Practice, and therefore know, what we may do; otherwise we shall but render the Scripture a dead Letter to us. Nor is it sufficient

(b) *Heb. ii. 3.*

that

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that we say our Prayers, go to Church, and observe the external Ordinances of the Gospel, and that we wrong no Man in our Dealings, but the Commandment may sink deep into our Hearts, and enliven us with a divine Flame of Love to, and Delight in it, that with our Spirits, fervently engaged therein, we may serve the Lord ; without which we shall but have *a Form of Godliness*, while we are *destitute of the Power of it*. And this accounts for what we sometimes have the melancholly Experience of, namely, of some who seem, for a Time, to be walking in a Course of Religion, they appear openly for the Truth, hold the Profession of Faith, and vindicate it against all Opposers, and yet, after all, in a Time of Trial, they fall away from the Truth, and the holy Ways of GOD ; and that, (to allude to the Words of the *Apostle*, (i) because *they did not serve in the Newness of the Spirit, but in the Oldness of the Letter*. They took no Care, as new-born Babes, to desire the pure Milk of the Word, that they might grow thereby, but contented themselves with having the Breast at their Mouths, and therefore, though they had a Name to live, for a while, yet they were truly dead ; and not having their Nature perfected by the divine Commandment, they finally came short of the Blessedness it was designed to lead them to. If therefore we would partake of the compleat Happiness the divine Commandment aims at, we must not only inform our Minds, and direct our outward Behaviour, by it ; but we must endeavour to search out the spiritual Meaning, and submit our Wills, and Consciences, entirely to the Government of it, that it may be in us a quickening Word ; for, as the *Apostle* observes, (k) *the Letter*

(i) *Rom. vii. 6.* (k) *2 Cor. iii. 6.*

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killeth, but the Spirit giveth Life. Not only does the Letter, or the Law given by *Moses*, bring under Condemnation, while the Spirit, or Grace of the Gospel by JESUS CHRIST, maketh alive ; but the Knowledge of the bare Letter of the divine Commandment will but aggravate a Man's Condemnation, if he is destitute of the ruling Power of it in his Heart, which truly conveys a new and divine Life unto the Soul.

Use II. The Second, and only remaining Use I shall make of this Doctrine is by Way of Exhortation. Wherefore we beseech you, *Brethren, that you receive not this Grace of GOD in vain ;* but be ye all perswaded now to make it your sincere Endeavour, so to behave your selves in your pious Regards to the divine Commandment, as remembering that it is exceeding broad. My Neighbours and Friends ; Do you believe it to be the Commandment of the ever-living GOD ? that it reaches to every one of you, and includes your whole Duty in it ? Is this the gracious End and Design of it, to make you wise, good and happy ? and does it forever remain the perfect Rule of Righteousness ? Then, I beseech you, let it find a due Entertainment with you, and pay all that Regard to it which the excellent Nature, and Ends, of such a divine Revelation demands of you. It is not for nothing that GOD hath written unto you the great Things of his Law, and shewed you the Line of your Duty, and made the Path of Life plain before you ; no, he hereby aims at the improving of you in Righteousness, and true Holiness, and the training of you up in the Practice of Vertue, that you may be fitted for the more sublime Services, and Entertainments of perfected Spirits,
and

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and for the everlasting Enjoyment of the divine Favour, in the heavenly World. And shall not the refreshing Thoughts of serving GOD perfectly, with Delight and Pleasure, and without Interruption or Impediment, and the Enjoyment of him as the satisfying Portion of your Souls, and your exceeding great Reward, be sufficient to influence you unto an hearty Respect to his holy Commandment, and prevail with you, to yield the ready Assent of your Minds unto all the Truths thereof, and the Submission of your Wills to the Conduct of those holy Rules he has prescribed ? If to be perfectly holy, and perfectly happy ; if to have your Nature wrought up to the noble and exalted Temper and Disposition of Angels, and possess all that can be delightful and entertaining to your rectified Powers and Capacities, and that forever, can have any Weight with you ; then let not the Commandment of GOD be grievous unto you, but receive the Truth in the Love thereof, firmly credit the Reports of the sacred Oracles, and universally conform to all the Precepts of it, that you may be found among the Friends of GOD, and be the true Disciples of CHRIST, who hear his Voice, and follow him, and may be owned, and accepted, by him, another Day, to the Glory, and Joys of Heaven.

What is the Work of Heaven ? but to obey GOD. There GOD sits enthroned in Glory, surrounded with his Myriads of holy Angels, who constantly, diligently, chearfully attend his Pleasure ; whose great Happiness it is, that there is an exact Agreement between the Will of GOD in Commanding, and their Will in Obeying ; who never have a Thought that any of the divine Commands are hard, nor so much

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much as a secret Inclination to act contrary to them : There too it is the Felicity of the Saint, that his Will is intirely swallowed up in the divine, and he *serves GOD Day, and Night* (l), constantly, uninterruptedly, and forever ; thus those holy Ones are arrived at their Centre, and there they are at Rest, and have not the least Tendency to move from it. And do we hope to get to Heaven, and Share in the Happiness, and join in the Services, of those perfected Spirits ? Oh ! how should the Thoughts hereof quicken us all, now to endeavour after an Imitation of those holy and happy Ones ? that as our Lord hath taught us to pray, (m) *Thy Will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven,* so we may make it our daily Care to conform our Hearts, and Lives to the Will of GOD, while we are on Earth, as Saints and Angels do above.

What mighty and powerful Obligations are lying upon us to be obedient to the Lord our GOD ? All his Goodness to us, in his common Providence, is to allure and draw us, to draw out our Desires after him, and move us to a ready Compliance with his Will ; all his Corrections are to excite and stir up our Aversions against what is offensive to him, that we may fly from every provoking Evil, and be true to him, and his Interest ; it is our own. But then what peculiar Advantages hath GOD favoured us with ? While the heathen World have only the Light of Nature to lead and guide them, we are even lift up to Heaven, are brought to the very Borders of the Land of Promise, have the direct Way thither clearly pointed out to us, and have a full View of

(l) *Rev.* vii. 15. (m) *Math.* vi. 10,

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the compleat, and endless, Happiness of the glorious Inhabitants of that blissful Place. Though, in the Times of gross Ignorance, GOD seemed to wink at the Follies of Men, yet *now he hath commanded all Men every where to repent*, and thus opens the Door of Hope to the guilty Creature, and letteth him know, that for the Sake of CHRIST, he will freely pardon all his past Offences, if he will but now become sincerely Obedient. And what Obligations hath a merciful GOD laid upon us, to walk in all his Ordinances and Commandments blameless, by giving his own Son to die for us, to purchase the Forgiveness of our Sins, and procure for us the Gift of the Holy Spirit, to enable us, for the future, to live in Obedience to Him ?

But if after all these Advantages, and Obligations, any of you resolve to go on in your Disobedience to the divine Commandment ; whose Crime will be so aggravated ? whose Punishment, will be so greatly increased ? You may well fear the Doom of *Capernaum*, to whom we find CHRIST saying, *(n) Thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto Heaven, shall be brought down to Hell. The Heathen will rise in the Judgment, and condemn the Men of this Generation*, who profane the Name of GOD, and live without Prayer to Him, and indulge the various brutal Appetites, and Passions ; and because such sin against the clearest Light, and the strongest Bonds, and Engagements, therefore their Punishment will be proportionable to their Crime, and an hotter, and more dreadful, Portion will be assigned unto them, in the Place of Torment : for, as our Saviour said to the

(n) *Math. xi. 23.*

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Capernaïtes, † It shall be more tolerable for the Land of Sodom, in the Day of Judgment, than for thee.

Oh that you would seriously think of these Things, and every one of you be effectually moved hereby to come to a fixed Resolution with yourselves, no longer to turn a deaf Ear to the Counsels of GOD, and refuse to hearken to his Voice, but turn at his Reproof, and give such a due Entertainment unto the exceeding broad Commandment, as GOD reasonably expects from you, and as you yourselves may reap the Benefit of.

And therefore, to himt a few things.

1. Treat the divine Commandment with an upright honest Heart. GOD, by his Prophet says, *(o) Do not my Words do good to him that walketh uprightly?* Such as preserve an honest Principle, an upright Intention, in what they do, especially, in their reading, and hearing the sacred Word, will, most likely, reap all the Benefit by it, which it is intended for; while they that suffer their Minds to be carried away with unreasonable, and groundless Prejudices against the divine Commandment, will be never the better for it, nor pay any suitable Regard to it. The very Frame and Temper of their own Minds, while under evil Affections and corrupt Dispositions, will render the Commandment contemptible, and unprofitable to them. Our Saviour, therefore, not only adviseth us, *to take heed how we hear*; *(p)* but informeth us, who they are that profit by the Commandment, even they that, *in an honest, and good Heart, receive the Word.* *(q)* That is

† *Matth. xi. 24. (o) Mic. ii. 7. (p) Luk. viii. 18. (q) Luk. viii. 15.*

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one who layeth aside his Prejudices, and bringeth a Mind open, and free, to receive Conviction. Let it be your Care, therefore, to get, and keep, such an honest upright Heart, not biassed and warped by any particular Fondness for, or Aversion to, any Thing, without good Reason ; and be ready to give Entertainment to any Truth, you find revealed, though it should contradict some of your former beloved Notions ; and to practise whatever is contained in the divine Commandment, though it go against the Grain, and Bent of your carnal Inclinations, and secular Views ; and to avoid whatever the Commandment of GOD forbiddeth, though it may cross your contracted vicious Habits. Thus, in this Respect, approve your selves to GOD, and your own Consciences ; and allow of no Disposition, no known groundless Dislike, to the Commandment, which your own Consciences, upon a serious Reflection, will condemn you for ; but, when you read, or hear, the divine Revelation, be willing to learn, and open to receive the Instructions of Wisdom.

2. Highly Prize the divine Commandment. It is a most excellent Law ; and shall we not prize it ? It every Way consults our Benefit and Advantage, in both Worlds ; and shall we not value it ? What is there that deserves your Esteem, and Veneration, equal to the Words of the great King ; those Words by which also you are made to live ? Is it not reasonable that every Thing should be valued according to its excellent Nature, and real Usefulness ? *Job* said, (c) *I esteem the Word of his Mouth, more than my necessary Food.* His daily Bread was not

(c) *Job* xxiii. 12.

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so necessary to him, nor so valued by him, as the Word of GOD, the Food of his Soul, upon which, its Life and Comfort, is dependent. And what is there in this World, which we are so apt to dote upon, that is comparable to the divine Commandment ? Which is in it self preferable to fine Gold, and more precious than Rubies, and which tends to make us the excellent in the Earth, and the Heirs of Heaven. And will you not then esteem it above all the Dross of this World ? See how the devout *Psalmist* expresses his Value for it, in the *Psalm* where my Text is, *O, how love I thy Law !* (says he) *The Law of thy Mouth is better to me than Thousands of Silver and Gold ; — I love thy Commandment above Gold, yea, above fine Gold ; — I esteem thy Precepts, concerning all Things, to be right, therefore I hate every false Way.* Thus learn to work up yourselves to such an high Esteem for the Commandment of GOD, as to prefer it to every thing else ; and this will be one effectual Means to prevent your being easily drawn away to any fordid sensual Gratifications. Look upon this as the bright Star that directs you unto Vertue, and Happiness, and rejoice therein, and prefer it to all the dark Shades of an imperfect World.

3. Diligently study the Commandment of GOD. He, that will not take the Pains to inform himself, will not be likely to know much of the Mind and Will of GOD ; and how shall he, that knows it not, be able to do it, or take the Comfort of it ? If therefore you would have your Manners reformed, your Hearts bettered, and your Happiness promoted, diligently search for this Wisdom, as for hid Treasure, and think not much to be at Pains with your selves, to find out

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the Knowledge of the Holy, and the Way to an endless Life. Search the Field for the Pearl of great Price. Thus CHRIST directed his Hearers, *(p)* *Search the Scriptures ; for in them ye think to have eternal Life ; and they are they which testify of me.* You must daily sit at the Posts of Wisdom's Gates, embrace the proper Opportunities of being instructed out of the Law of GOD, that you may know Wisdom and Understanding, and the Fear of the Lord ; for *how should you understand, except some Man guide you ?* The *Priest's Lips shall preserve Knowledge, and the People shall receive the Law at his Mouth.* But then, seeing it is your great Advantage to have the Word of GOD in your own Hands, you should diligently read therein, and that daily, that by comparing Scripture with Scripture, you may be able to see with your own Eyes, and know what GOD requires you to believe, and do, in order to your Comfort here, and your eternal Well-being hereafter. And to this add your frequent Meditation on the divine Law, that it may ever be with you, as the Man of your Counsel, to direct your Practice Day, and Night. And earnestly beg it of GOD to open your Eyes, that you may understand the Wonders out of his Law, that he may give unto you the Spirit of Wisdom, and Revelation, in the Knowledge of him who hath called you unto Glory, and Vertue. In a Word, If you would have CHRIST for yours, and walk in the Paths of Vertue, and obtain eternal Life through him, you must carefully attend the Methods he has directed you to, and diligently read, and hear, and meditate, and pray ; and thus go to him to teach you, who is able to open your

(p) *Job. v. 39.*

blind

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blind Eyes, and give you Understanding, that you may live.

4. Bring yourself, and all your Actions to the Commandment. The Commandment is the Rule of Life ; and therefore you owe this to it, to eye it as your Rule, and examine, and prove, all your Actions by it, as the certain Standard of Truth and Holiness. This will be the Way for you so to govern your whole Walk, as that it may bear some agreeable Proportion to the only Rule, and that you may be able to adorn the Doctrine of GOD your Saviour in all things. The Psalmist enquires, (q) *Wherewithal shall a young Man cleanse his Way ?* and the answer to it is, *by taking Heed thereto, according to Thy Word.* This Word must be a Lamp unto your Feet, and a Light unto your Path, as ever you would run the Way of the divine Commandment. Without this you will be in great Danger of running into Errors, in Opinion, and Practice, and give Satan a great Advantage against you, to draw you away from your Steadfastness in your Christian Course ; but while you diligently compare yourself, and Actions, with the Word, and arm yourself with the Sword of the Spirit, *it is written*, you will be the better able to repel Temptations, and preserve yourself pure from the great Transgression. Be very careful therefore to put in Practice all known Duties, of Piety, and Devotion, to GOD, and of Justice, and Charity, to Man, and to avoid all known Sins of Profaneness, Injustice, Intemperance, and whatsoever else you find the Word of GOD warns you against ; that your whole Lives may be a constant, steady, uniform,

(q) *Pf. cxix. 9.*

Obedience

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Obedience to the divine Commandment: then shall you not be ashamed, when you have respect unto all his Commandments: then will not your own Hearts reproach you, for acting contrary to the Light of your Mind, and your Duty to GOD, but approve the Wisdom of your Conduct, and afford you good Hope of a happy Conclusion.

5. Finally; Live upon the divine Commandment. The Design of the Commandment is to promote our Comfort in this World, and our compleat Happiness in the next; great and precious are the Promises by which this is made over, and secured to us. Let the obedient Soul then take this as his proper Food and Nourishment, and live upon it; live in the Exercise of a lively Faith in the Promises of GOD, and in JESUS CHRIST, the great, and only Head, and Mediator, of the new Covenant, *in whom all the Promises are Yea, and Amen.* Here, therefore, let the obedient Soul repair, as to his *Asylum*, his Place of Safety in the evil Day; and at what Time he is in Distress and Trouble, of any Kind, regularly lay hold upon the Promises, and all the Blessings contained therein, and from thence fetch in seasonable, and sufficient Support to his Mind under the Afflictions that befall him, and let in the Beams of divine Light, and Joy, in the darkest, and most melancholly Hours, that pass over him. Thus you find the holy *Psalmist* deriving his Comfort from the divine Commandment in the midst of all the Afflictions he met withal, (r) *This is my Comfort in my Affliction, (says he) for thy Word hath quickened me,— Thy Statutes have been my Songs, in*

(r) *Pf. cxix. 50, 54.*

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the House of my Pilgrimage. Let us then draw Water out of these Wells of Salvation, and drink in of the River of divine Pleasures, and feed upon the full Joys, which are thus provided for us. Think not to find Relief from the Creature, and therefore go not to an imperfect World, alone, to supply our Wants, or redress our Grievances ; but go to the exceeding broad Commandment, where GOD, and CHRIST, and Earth, and Heaven, are made over to the believing, penitent, obedient Soul ; and in this Portion let us rejoice, though we should be poor, despised, and afflicted, in this World ; for this is a Portion infinitely preferable to all that the whole Creation, alone, can yield us. While others, therefore, are saying, to all about them, *Who will shew us any Good ?* And have no farther Concern upon their Minds, than how they may grow great, and grasp enough of this World in their Hands ; let us take in the Sweetness of the divine Promises, and rejoice in the Lifting up of the Light of GOD's Countenance upon us, more than in the Increase of Corn, and Wine, and Oil. So you see the *Psalmist* slighting a Portion in this Life, and living upon the Promise, saying (s) *Deliver me from the Men of this World, who have their Portion in this Life ;—as for me, I shall behold thy Face in Righteousness, I will be satisfied when I awake with thy Likeness.*

Let this be our constant Temper, and Behaviour, towards an imperfect World, and towards the exceeding broad Commandment of GOD ; and then, when all the Springs of Nature shall have run dry, and the final Dissolution of the present Frame of this Visible World shall have put an End to all the fair Promises, and delusive

(s) *Pf.* xvii. 14, 15.

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Flatteries, of created Objects, as well as taken off all their Terror, we shall have a larger Experience of the Excellency of the divine Commandment, in the Fulness, and Perpetuity of its Happiness, and be everlastingly entertained in the Delightful Enjoyment of GOD, the inexhaustible Fountain of all Blessedness. I conclude all with the Advice of the *Apostle* to the *Romans*,
(1) *Be not conformed to this World, but be ye transformed, by the renewing of your Minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect Will of GOD.*

(1) *Rom. xii. 2.*

F I N I S.



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